

JOHN RIDE!

BERTA RUCK



HERE is a new romance by Berta Ruck as fresh and alluring as its title. It is the story of one Melody Wynne, a chorus dancer of good family, and with a temperament which causes her to treat the whole of life as a joy-ride escapade. When her devoted lover, Keith Cartwright, proposes to her, she tosses up as to whether she shall marry him and go off to India, or continue her profession. The job wins, but only for the time being; and the end of the story shows why it was that Love, this time, got the better of Profession.

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JOY-RIDE!

NOVELS BY BERTA RUCK

HIS OFFICIAL FIANCÉE
THE WOOING OF ROSAMOND FAYRE
THE BOY WITH WINGS
IN ANOTHER GIRL'S SHOES
THE GIRLS AT HIS BILLET
MISS MILLION'S MAID
THE THREE OF HEARTS
THE YEARS FOR RACHEL
A LAND-GIRL'S LOVE STORY
THE DISTURBING CHARM
SWEETHEARTS UNMET
THE BRIDGE OF KISSES
SWEET STRANGER
THE ARRANT ROVER
THE WRONG MR. RIGHT
THE SUBCONSCIOUS COURTSHIP
SIR OR MADAM
THE DANCING STAR
THE LEAP YEAR GIRL
THE CLOUDED PEARL
LUCKY IN LOVE
THE IMMORTAL GIRL
KNEEL TO THE PRETTIEST
THE PEARL THIEF
HER PIRATE PARTNER
THE MIND OF A MINX
MONEY FOR ONE
THE YOUNGEST VENUS
JOY-RIDE!

JOY-RIDE!

A Novel

By

BERTA RUCK



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1929

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Dedicated to
JUNE
WHO SAW IT ALL

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PART I

LOVE IN LONDON

CHAPTER I

THE PROPOSAL

*About meeting an attractive
young man, and about things
that are no treat nowadays*

I

"LIFE," said the great Philosopher, Somebody-or-Other, "cannot be treated as a joy-ride or escapade."

"Why not?" said Melody Wynne, she being that sort of girl. Hence this story, which starts on a morning in May.

II

"What an attractive young man!"

This was what Melody thought that morning when, swinging down the suburban street as fast as her legs could carry her towards the Charing Cross bus, she caught sight of a taller figure striding up hill from the point where the buses stopped. And it was because it was a figure in such contrast from her suburb's prosaic morning-throng of matrons burdened with shopping-bags and wheeling perambulators (you know them? If you are a girl you look at them in pity, horror, or both; feeling certain that when you are married you, at least, will never become as they are!) that at the sight of him Melody lighted up into the wonder: "Gosh! Who's that? What an attractive-looking young man!"

Cheerful thought for the day: *to meet an attractive stranger in a well-known place means good luck*, which

was certainly needed by this girl-on-the-stage-but-out-of-work bound city-wards on the chance of a job. A thrill went through Melody threading her way through that park of perambulators in front of the sawdusty grocery-stores, the stripy red-and-white butcher's shop, and all the rest of the everydayness towards this young man.

He walked like some big dog in good condition; he seemed part of the optimistic, busy, blue-and-white May morning. Cool, lavish English sunlight through leaves of plane-trees at the side of the road made, as he came nearer, a moving, dappling pattern of hand-shaped patches over his light grey flannels, which were roomy at the shoulders, well-fitting at waist and hips.

"—— successful suit, egad! Probably cost more than I shall ever earn per month in any job. Looks as if it had been cut by two of those posh London tailors, one for the jacket and the other for the bags," was the rapid mental comment of Melody, who, herself possessing no clothes worthy to be called clothes, had an eye for trap-pings both masculine and feminine. "Now I wonder who this lad—"

She had got as far as this when she came up face to face with the approaching stranger, and saw—Lord, what a bitter blow, what a nasty knock!—that it was merely Keith.

III

This sort of thing does happen, ladies. Has it not occurred to you to turn some crowded street corner, to catch sight of some approaching figure, to say to yourself, "*There's a pretty girl!*" (or, on the other hand, "*There's a pitiful hag!*"), to come a step nearer and then

to find that you have been staring at your own reflection in a plate-glass window?

Some such mild optical delusion had happened to Melody.

"Ha, it's you, is it?" said she, so taken aback that she did not keep out of her tone an unspoken "*only*." "And there was I, taking you for some young *man* sailing up High Street."

"Well! So I am, aren't I?" asked Keith Cartwright (justifiably hurt) as he pulled up beside Melody, caught her by the arm to move her out of the way of a double mail-cart containing two sphinx-faced babies and a pyramid of vegetables, and put the high-light to the arresting group they made, he and Melody, by giving the sunshine an uninterrupted chance at his thick swept-back fair hair.

Now the hat was just Keith's every day hat, even the old hat as worn by practically every man with whom all of us associate; yes, the old grey felt with that black band and the rainspots.

"But you've got a new suit, Keith!"

"This? Old as the hills: won off my brother to wear because my others were all being cleaned in a rush."

"I see," said Melody, and did now see that the suit was not "posh," but an unpretentious reach-me-down. The reason Keith's vesture appeared to be cut by artists of Jermyn and Albemarle Streets, was thanks to Keith's figure. He had a good one, if you came to think of it; Melody, of course, never had come to think of it. If you were suddenly asked to give a vivid word-picture of your best-known brother, could you rise to the occa-

sion? I could not: nor could Melody, if asked to describe Mr. Keith Cartwright. There is such a thing as living too near a person. Looking at a person at so close an angle that presently you see nothing at all. There is such a thing as becoming immune to his magnetism. This was Melody, in regard to Keith.

After all, when a man is your brother's pal, when he has been in and out of your house for uncounted years, when you have seen him, day in, day out, for springs, summers, autumns and winters, have danced with him, played tennis with him, been ragged about him by any girl who has seen you together, have been taught to punt and to drive a car by him, and have forgotten when you first realized that he was rather keen on you, how can you tell what he is really like? It had taken a chance encounter with Keith at a time and place where she did not expect to see him, walking, instead of driving his own little car, and wearing a suit that she did not recognize, to give her that momentary fresh impression, "What's happened to the car?"

He told her. . . . This type of conversation must be familiar to you? . . . Briefly, the Aero-Morgan was temporarily indisposed.

"And where may you be off to this hour of the morning, Keith? Why aren't you working?"

IV

Keith Cartwright spent the hours of toil in the hydro-electric department of a company of constructional engineers whose headquarters were in Victoria Street, S.W.1, that great engineering centre. The company specialized

in the civil and electrical work attendant on the development of a country's natural power resources—coal, oil, water. Keith's salary was five hundred a year, with fifty pounds interest from a small share in the company. He was keen on his job, and somewhat touchingly imbued with what some call high-falutin ideals as to progress. For Keith, the hand of romance was ever on the lever laid, but romance has two hands. With the other it never ceased to point out, to remind, to comment on the marvel of the girl Keith also idealized, and who now looked up at him with bright friendly eyes and asked him, "Why aren't you working?"

"They've given me the day off. I told you that General Utilities Finance Corporation had obtained the concession to harness the water power and electrify the state of our dusky friend?" Keith meant an Indian rajah. "Well, our jolly old firm have got the contract from the G.U. to build, not only the dam required, by gosh, but all the doings—pipe line, power house, and overhead electric power line," there seemed to shine with delight the whole of Keith, his eyes, the soft down on his upper cheek, the even line of teeth showing as he talked. "And, Melody!" he drew an excited breath, "I'm to go out as assistant to our chief in charge of construction, to make the necessary detailed survey of the territory."

"You? They've spotted young genius?"

"They have!"

"I say, I'm so glad."

"That I'm to go?"

"Is it for long?"

Keith told her it might possibly keep him busy for

three or four months; in an enthusiastic gabble he began talking engineering shop. Melody throwing in an occasional "Imagine that!" Usually, she was attracted by details of engineering—which most of her girl friends would have considered the last word in boredom. Vaguely, untechnically, she was conscious of the Glamour behind the gulf-spanning bridge, the water tower, the aeroplane propeller melting into its circle of mist. . . . ("If I'd been a boy, I'd have been an engineer, like Daddy and Bill and Keith. . . .")

To-day she seemed absent, non-receptive. For when Keith, in the tone of a man who hoped he might be going to administer a shock, said, "I've got to get my kit for India, *at once*," Melody asked flippantly, "Here?", and waved at the shop they were passing (a suburban draper's).

A look of purpose began growing at the back of Keith's eyes. He told Melody that it was because he wanted her to help him to shop and have a spot of lunch in town, that he had been coming up to call for her at Lilac Lodge.

V

This was the name of the roomy suburban villa, which had been bequeathed by some once prosperously-widowed great-aunt, to Colonel Wynne, Melody's father, a retired sapper, who hailed originally from some rambling country house in some so-called "unpronounceable" village of North Wales. In days when England's large, well-to-do upper middle-class families possessed those large and apparently willing staffs of serfs to minister unto them, even when the Family went in, as it was called, for lots of

company, there had been built this and other Lilac Lodges, which would be better named "White Elephant's Castle." Here Colonel Wynne lived with his second wife ("Steppy" to Melody, and one of these admirable house-keepers who are only *not* good at keeping the family in the house when they have anywhere to go outside) with any of his eight hard-up optimistic married children, who, when needing a cheap well-run hotel within easy reach of town, became paying-guests, with his bachelor son Bill, the engineer, and with his youngest daughter Melody when she was resting.

Barring the interval of a fortnight in some show which had dismally failed, young Melody, who, by the way, was no principal, always, buoyantly, one of the chorus! had now been "resting" for months.

VI

"Keith, darling," she said with easy friendliness, "luck may have turned for me as well. I've something important on myself. Chance of another job, egad! Got my little costume here in my case all ready—oh, why should you bother to carry it? So shopping is off, and lunch I can't promise. But I'll journey into town with you if you'll step on it."

Quickening their pace they sped downhill, Keith's grey flannelled limbs not needing to shorten their stride for Melody's in their last unimpeachable pair of silk stockings. They were worth good stockings, Melody's legs; next to her wide sweet *enfant terrible* stare they were the feature you first noticed. For at an epoch when, in the antique phrase, the sight of ladies' legs should be no treat

either to the conductor or anybody else, Melody's were a treat. There is a rivalry about who owns the best legs in Europe, the Great Mistinguett or that other perpetually quoted French *vedette*, Arabesque. Possibly, if young Melody had been a celebrity with an adequate Press agent, you might have heard how Melody's legs were slim without a trace of thinness, how firmly curved at the calf, how delicately modelled at the ankle, and how heavily insured against mishap!

"And what's your job, Melody?"

"Haven't the vaguest. Anne rang up this morning when I was still in the swimming-bath, and she left some wild message about my being sure to turn up at this address in the Strand at eleven-fifteen. You know the girl we called Anne the Aristocrat, who was with me at the ballet class and afterwards on tour. She knew I was out of work, and she seemed to think there was a chance of getting me into some show with her. I don't know any more than you do what it is, Keith."

"Don't you? Well . . . anyhow! Whatever it is—don't take that job, Melody."

"Keith, why on earth not?"

"Because," explained Keith, "I think it would be a much sounder scheme if instead you got married to me."

This he said exactly as he might have suggested, "We should do better to take the 19 bus and change at Piccadilly Circus."

VII

Therefore Keith's tone produced in Melody the exact opposite of the thrill which had taken her when she first saw, swinging up towards her under a dappling of dark-

grey leaf shadows on golden-grey flannels, what she had thought was an attractive-looking young man. Even when she had realized that his name was Only-Keith, some vestige had persisted of that curious faint thrill. Vanished now, its place was taken by a definite recoil.

"Get married! Great heavens, what an awful and appalling thought! Get married? What do you mean, Keith dear? At once, while we're in town?"

"Of course, not at once," said Keith, curiously curt. "I only meant in about a week's time. I don't sail for ten days. There'd be no bones made about my taking my wife with me. They would let me park you somewhere decent, we should be able to put in a good deal of time together. I'm putting this with no frills. You understand."

Melody looked at him. She just looked at him.

"Yes, well, I'm sorry if I've put you off, Melody. I only heard myself last night, and I thought—I thought—"

Exasperated, Melody thought "How like Keith! How prosaic. 'No frills,' as men say, as if having no frills was such a *catch*? Yet it's scarcely two hundred years since the most sporting men used literally to cover themselves with frills."

For Melody, who as far as passion goes, was still the complete Sleeping Beauty; was, even consciously, thirsty enough for Romance. In her mind, during the short walk between leaving the shops and arriving at the sign "Stop Here for Omnibus," she had seen visions. An Elizabethan in gay velvet doublet and trunk-hose, parting the branches of a blossoming pear, beneath which he waited for his love. A cavalier, with love-locks sweeping

his knee as he bent to kiss her fingers. A young Georgian, stripped to his white silk ruffled shirt, duelling-sword in hand. These were the lads, she thought. As for your modern, who without any frills, confronted a girl at half-past ten in the morning, all in the middle of trams and prams, and animals' carcasses hung up outside the butchers'—as for your grey-flannel engineer, who blurted out, "I thought you might get married to me—" What could be less compelling?

"Keith, what on earth is one to say to this?"

"You know what I'd like you to say."

"Didn't I know you'd say that," sighed Melody; which was unkind, but she was only twenty-two.

"No chance of your saying what I want, Melody?"

"Oh, I wish to goodness you hadn't begun this . . . look! Bus just starting. Have to run for it."

They ran. With a couple of flying leaps they boarded the bus, and climbed up to the front seat, where they would have room for their legs.

Hundreds of times Keith had sat beside this adorable, familiar, inaccessible creature. Hundreds of times he'd said to himself, "About time I got this off my chest—"

Now, to-day, he had. Having done so, he did not know what more to say.

VIII

Do not imagine that Keith Cartwright, aged twenty-seven, was another of those legendary strong, silent men. Like any other intelligent being, he had generally plenty to say to his fellow creatures. His vocabulary was not limited to that of the average Public School boy. He

knew more than one word for each common object they passed as the bus voyaged into the main stream of traffic. He could express himself both to his contemporaries and to his mother's friends. Mrs. Cartwright (better known as Claudia Crane, the novelist, whose job was with words) declared that Keith wrote a better letter than she did; his firm, too, had discovered in what a lucid manner he could put things for them to the densest clients.

He could talk easily to anyone, except to one person!

Something held him up from expressing his feelings to Melody Wynne.

It was not as if Keith had not known other girls . . . but, far from helping him, this had showed him, open-eyed, that what he wanted in this world was this girl, and not any other. To him she represented everything most dear and most remote, most daily and essential, since for him, at least, familiarity had dulled nothing. He could not imagine daylight—with no meeting of that wide, sweet stare. He could not imagine music and dancing—with no melting of Melody's step into his own. He could not envisage life, years to come, himself growing older, a home, children—without Melody. And yet—yet—yet he could not tell her so. A hedge of inhibitions rose between him and her, and over it he could only blurt out, in the crudest manner, that he wanted to marry her before he went away. Wanted? God! No lyric Elizabethan, no hard-fighting, hard-loving cavalier, no amorous duelling Georgian, had more to give his woman than had this twentieth century engineer.

Melody, sitting serenely beside him, could not guess that even a bus-ride into town with her seemed to him romantic and fragrant as a flight on a magic carpet.

IX

Indeed, there is magic about the May-time look of London on such a morning! The year was at one of those briefly perfect spells when our drab city clothes herself in webs of golden sunshine over young green, when the ugliness of every Victorian villa, every modern jerry-built bungalow, may be forgiven for the sake of the gardens; those bouquets of lilac, those long droops of yellow laburnum above a glow of crimson may. Every girl that went by seemed to have a new spring hat, at every street corner flower-sellers' baskets were heaped high with Her-rick's daffodils.

X

"And you said you'd be away three or four months, Keith?"

"Yes." (At least she hadn't definitely refused.) "Melody, you can't say it's been sudden."

Followed a jerky, bus-top conversation, punctuated by the conductor's ejaculations, cramped by the possibility of being overheard. Fellow-passengers always looked at, and if possible listened to, Melody Wynne, one of these natural centres of attraction.

"You said, Keith—"

"*Tickets, please!*" Interval; business with tickets, typical of daily life that takes no heed of the big moments in love's tragedy or farce.

"Keith, you said that they'd only told you last night that you were to go out and electrify this area, or whatever it is—"

"*Any more tickets, please?*"

"Melody, I mean about— You must have known?"

"What, that you liked me? Oh, that, of course," Melody agreed frankly. "But honestly, old thing, I didn't know that it was so acute, of up to the marrying point. As for this idea of India, and a week— Good heavens, it's like—"

"*A pahnd note?*" broke in angrily the voice of the conductor. Melody glanced round at his nice little Cockney fox-terrier face under the peaked cap. "*Change a pahnd note? Couldn't do it. 'Aven't got no change. People didn't ought to go payin' their fares with pahnd notes!*"

Melody sympathized. Wasn't this proposal of Keith's something demanding an exchange which she could not produce?

"*Some o' these 'ere femiles,*" grumbled the conductor bitterly, "*comes out shoppin' for the summer siles, and not a copperonem—*"

"Keith, you've always got silver—"

"Er—we've got a pound in silver here!"

But the flustered fare behind them had found six-pence.

"*Oh, you 'ave. Ereyer then, tuppence, thrippence, fourpence. Thank you, madam,*" in suddenly mollified tones. "*Any more tickets, please?*"

"*Stop, stop, I wanted to get down at the 'Dove and Unicorn.'*"

"I didn't get leave for the day just to *shop!* I had to nip up and see you first, Melody! I wanted—"

"*Why couldn't yer sy you wanted the Unicorn? Ting!*"

"And when do you think you could let me have some sort of definite answer?"

Keith sounded as though he were talking about a tennis tournament in which Melody might or might not partner him. How could she guess that the inside of his mouth was dry, the palms of his clenched hands wet?

"Keith, India's so far away."

"Didn't you once tell me you'd adore travelling as far as possible in every known direction?"

"Yes, but when I said that I didn't mean in a settled down, married-and-done-for way. I meant touring, perhaps, I meant with things still happening. More of a joy-ride, more romantic!"

"Oh. Quite—"

To poor Keith this honeymoon to India would have represented life's most romantic joy-ride. Together on a great ship. The tropic nights; new stars in a throbbing velvet sky; shifting scenes of a magic voyage—oh, girl, girl, can't you see it?

Apparently she couldn't see it, apparently you couldn't make her understand. Helplessly baffled and stunned, Keith said merely "Sorry."

Melody took a glance at his profile. He had taken off his hat which lay on his grey flannel knee, and he looked like a young boy smitten with blinding headache.

"Keith, darling, I do feel a beast."

"No earthly reason why you should. But look here, if you won't marry me before I go, couldn't you bring yourself to make it an engagement and see how you feel about it when I get home?"

"Oh, but, Keith, wouldn't that be just as bad—I mean,

cramp our style sort of, just the same as being married?"

"I suppose so, if that's how you feel about it. So it's no?"

If seven out of every ten women dislike saying a definite "No," Melody Wynne was the eighth, to whom it was not merely a matter of disliking, but of loathing. Awful, saying no to people of whom one was fond. She wavered, like a light in the wind. An alternative occurred to her.

Suddenly she said, "Keith. Look here. I'll make you a sporting offer."

"Well?"

"This job of Anne's—I don't know what it is. The exciting part of these girls is they ring you up out of nowhere, and you haven't an idea what they'll suggest next. This may be London, exhibition ballroom dancing, the provinces, revue, ballet. I don't know yet. But if I don't get it at this audition, it'll be the last straw to a run of back luck, and I'll take it to mean—"

"Tickets, please! . . . You going on, Miss?"

". . . I shall know I'm not meant to be a dancer, and that I may as well throw my hand in and get married. You see, Keith?"

"Oh, I quite *see*," said he. Then, because it was impossible for him to feel any more unhappy, reaction took him; he put back his head and laughed aloud.

"So that is the place marriage has come to take in a girl's scheme of things? Gentlemen's proposals are no treat to her." He had been jolted out of his usual manner to Melody. For one moment he was talking to this hedged, adored, disturbing darling as if she were any

other girl. She stared wider at the change in his voice, and as he looked back at her full in the face, his clean young mouth took a mocking twist.

"A couple of quid, or say three quid a week, Melody, and you don't look at my humble offer. But if they don't take you on at this stage-job, then you'll consider mine. Is that it?"

"Put like that, Keith, it sounds pretty grim."

"It is pretty grim!"

"Yes, but—" She lowered her voice; both of them had become uncomfortably aware of fellow-passengers with straining ears.

Indeed, probably every shopping-matron and every errand-boy on the top of that bus knew that highly important and personal matters were under discussion by that fine-looking young fellow and that attractive girl in the front seat. Bit of a lovers' tiff, was the conductor's private summing-up. Some people never know when they're well off, beautiful morning like this, an' all!

Melody, in an earnest murmur—

"I don't mean getting engaged and young men are nothing in a girl's life. They are! They must be. Out-of-date to think otherwise. But, once there was nothing *but* them, Keith. They were the one-and-only Thrill! For some girls there's nothing else worth mentioning, even now. Look at Bill's girl, Doreen—!"

XI

A short digression while we look at this Doreen, who was a girl-clerk working in Keith's office, and who had, somehow, become Melody's brother's *fiancée*—or, as he

would call it—*fiasco*! Doreen's idea of an engaged man was one who, in his girl's presence, never took his eyes off her face, nor uttered a remark that was not to, or about, Her. Instead of finding and securing this treasure she had fallen passionately, helplessly, disastrously, in love with that serene ruffian, Bill Wynne. Further, she committed the fatal mistake of manifesting this at every turn. How often had "Bill's girl, Doreen," almost cried her dark eyes out in hot tears of jealousy! Since she had none of the usual cause to be jealous, she fretted over Bill's radiant preoccupation with pals, games, Territorials, and other he-man interests. Bill's girl, like Bill's stepmother, was the possessive kind; and, like "Steppy," she resented "her" man's family—which is jealousy's most hopeless form. For a woman may out-wit or outlive "*the other woman*," ousting her from a man's heart, but who can oust the mother, the sister whose blood runs red in that man's own veins?

Therefore, very bitterly, Bill's girl, Doreen, suffered. . . . Unconsciously she provided an object-lesson to Bill's sister—*what not to be like!*

XII

"—but most other women have mounds of other interests," Melody pursued, "just like men. 'I could not love thee, dear, so well, loved I not science'—or architecture, or the Olympic games, or swimming the Channel, or flying the Atlantic, or one of those interests . . . 'More.' You must see that, Keith?"

Only too well he saw it.

"You do?" said Melody, more satisfied. "After all,

we've got to be neo-Moderns (or whatever they call it this week). You understand that." (She understood him less than he understood her.)

Keith, stunned to the heart, thought, "Whatever happens, she will always be happier than I am. For me there's only her and my work. For her, not because she's a girl, but because it's her temperament, everything she sees is a joke. 'She shall have music wherever she goes'; because everywhere she goes, even when she's working, is a joy-ride. But not with me. I've got to stick this. God knows how."

There seemed to be no effort in his voice as he asked, "How soon will you be able to tell me which interest it is, Melody?"

"May be kept waiting hours. Lunch I can't depend on. I'll tell you results at tea. . . ."

Ten minutes later Melody was in the midst of one of those other interests.

CHAPTER II

THE AUDITION

*About some of the girls
who get jobs on the stage;
and about how they do it*

I

UP the stairs leading to the audition room at the top of a high building in a side street off the Strand Melody found a Jacob's Ladder composed, not of angels but of chorus girls.

"Chorus girls!" To old-fashioned ears there still lingers about that word an echo of fascinating impropriety. All those girls are supposed to be alike: facile, fast, steeped in and stamped by a life of pleasure unrestrained. . . .

About fifty of them were waiting here.

A collection so mixed it was reminiscent of the old days of the land army. Daughters of the New Poor, hobnobbing with daughters of what used to be described as "the Lower Orders." Girls from homes called "The Laurels," "Brynymor," and "Taunton House," in Fulham, Tooting or Wimbledon. Girls up from the country's heart. Girls who had never been further from Town than Kew Gardens or Tagg's Island. Girls who in pre-war days would have been early pushed by their mothers into domestic service; into some good house under one of these here real martinets of housekeepers, so that they should be well-trained, beginning in the scullery, and going on until they were worth top wages as house-parlourmaids. Other girls, who, also in pre-war days, would have "come out" conventionally, and would have been given a London season after being presented—with train, ostrich feathers, portraits in the papers, society photographer, hairdresser at the house, and all complete. Here they were, lumped together in poverty's democracy; the New Army of the chorus, tasting alike the sweets of its good comradeship and fun, the bitterness of its disillusionment, its frustrated effort, its spite.

Some of them leant tired shoulders against the staircase wall; some perched on metal-tipped stairs, munching chocolates, smoking gaspers, or repairing mouths.

Some had come alone, and were "keeping themselves to themselves." Some gossiped excitedly in twos and threes—

"And, darling, as I told him straight out. . . ."

"Anyone worked for her before?"

"Olive has; Olive says a nigger driver. . . ."

An unseen voice which was Olive: "I'll telephone Mars she is! A nigger driver; but *clever!*—look where she is. And out of what? Can't sing a note in tune. She can't really dance. She's got a face like this!" A stir in the group behind which Olive made that face. "All she's got are those legs, and her grasp for detail. Wish I'd got *that!* She overlooks nothing in dressing, Sybil. Look at her. She's stout—"

"Olive! She's surely small?"

"She'd look stout," insisted the voice called Olive, "unless she was careful to get all the top parts of all her dresses fitting her like a piece of mosaic down to the skirt line. You notice, darling. And her skirts all melting into fringe from I don't know *where*, so as to show as much as possible of those legs. *That's* Arabesque! You wait. You notice how she always gets one particular make of silk stocking—"

"Didn't you know she'd bought this new music hall they've put up on Montmartre?"

"—one particular make of silk stocking, thinner than skin, with a gloss on it? And one particular shoe—"

"Four quid a week, darling!"

"—always that slenderizing Louis heel, and that pointed toe, so as to make her feet and ankles always look It—"

"But, of *course*, we get more than the French girls!"

The orchestrated gabble went on, now this girlish voice uppermost, now that.

Certain of these stage applicants looked exactly as unsophisticated people would expect them to look. What Melody's disapproving stepmother, for example, would call "typically theatrical," all Chelsea-garden-party-frock, black-trimmed eyes, and joyous canary hair dye! Others, as restrained as any figure that ever stepped out of a university settlement committee meeting; others, again, might have been any neatly efficient typist applying for a post.

At the sight of the tall last-comer who bounded in there was a stir, a craning of heads, and sundry calls of recognition from various rungs up and down the Jacob's Ladder.

"Darling!—look who's here!"

"My God, if it isn't Melody-and-the-Bun!"

"Thought she must be at *least* dead or married!"

"Melody, where have you been all these ages?"

"We haven't met since Glasgow pantomime!"

"*'The more we are together!'* And look, here's Sybil—"

"*And young Ginger!*"

Young Ginger, whose tribal name ought to express her to you, so that I will only add her age (which was sixteen) and her figure (which was that of a boy of ten), turned to give out in a dramatic and husky Cockney whisper, "My Gawd! Oo put you onto this job, Mel? Was it Hanne?"

"Yes! Where is she?"

Then from a tall girl all in grey, wedged half-way up

the stairs, sounded an ultra-languid drawl of "Hullo, Melody, my dear! So you did get my telephone message? Your maid didn't seem to grasp a word ah parlourmaid said, and even when she dragged me to the telephone it didn't seem to make matters any *bettah*. However, as long as somebody grasped *something!*"

"Hullo, Anne." Melody smiled all over her face at the sound of her friend's well-remembered voice. If you heard it without seeing Anne le Mesurier, you would certainly take it for somebody's imitation of a stage duchess. Incredibly refined, it was, refined, I say—do not pronounce it "refained." Anne loathed that trick. Anne merely wished you never to forget that she was a lady, and that all her people—well, briefly, as Melody once said, no one has ever *been* quite so well-connected as Anne liked to appear; with the result that strangers, including those rungs of the Jacob's Ladder who had not before set eyes on Anne, conceived for her at sight a black and bitter loathing.

"Decent of you to ring me up," said Melody. "What's the excitement about, Hanne?"

Miss Anne le Mesurier, in that voice which caused several girls above and below her on the staircase to cast indignant glances at her and at each other out of the extreme corners of their eyes, leant over the hats of the intervening applicants and proceeded to explain to Melody at the bottom of the ladder that this excitement was about a troupe being sent over for the new show coming on in Paris—"

"What? In Paris? And me who spent my childhood's earliest years near Fontainebleau with grandmamma?"

ejaculated Melody, gaping enraptured upwards. (I forgot to tell you that Melody Wynne was of two nationalities, British and French, so that here you may if you like insert Bill Wynne's inevitable comment that your mongrel is always the cleverest dog. "Clever," however, was not the quality of Melody, in spite of a mental quickness at the uptake, and a perfect use of her body. There are advantages, but there are more difficulties and disadvantages known to us who are of mixed blood, of mixed upbringing—and who would not, for all we could see, give up one of the two sides. Dramatically, the Wynne family used to quote: "*In my heart it has not died, the strife that raged on Severn Side. They fight forever, East and West, in the marches of my breast.*" Lightheartedly, the Wynne family would then fare forth into the Battle of Life between which and themselves remained the smoke-screen of Glamour, which so often turned it into a sham fight.) Thus Melody, bounding into this audition; Melody, exclaiming, "Going to *Paris*? Oh, my dears, how divine! Here's where I turn completely French."

"Here's where you do the parley-voing for all of us, then!"

And here an old-fashioned figurehead-like bust was thrust forth from the plantation of girls so larch-like slim; another well-known face beamed from the ascending double row of faces; another friend for Melody here?

"Dear old Mamie!"

"Piece of luck if we all got together again, eh?"

"Oh, Anne, I wonder if there's an earthly?"

("All of us wondering that!" twittered one of the canary-headed strangers.)

There were ten vacancies, Anne reported, gazing languidly through the last speaker, with fifty-odd applicants. It was for a troupe of forty Johnson-Brown girls. This was to be a chorus for Arabesque. "Forty English girls she wants, darling, to get four pounds a week (and how she'll hate paying it!). Mr. Johnson-Brown—" Here Anne nodded backwards towards the closed door at the top of the stairs—

"Mr. Johnson-Brown could, of course, put his hand at once upon at least thirty of his old girls, but, well! as there were those ten vacancies," Anne thought she might let Melody know at once, don't you know, "as it would be rather a jest if the Great Five could manage to get in a show altogether once more."

These "Five" meant Anne herself, Melody, Mamie, Sybil, and that sixteen-year-old red-haired *gamine* of the tribe of Ginger. Anne and Melody had met at the ballet school, and had been joined by the other three on a not-to-be-forgotten provincial tour, when they had been five out of the Twelve Moonbeams; had been Pirates, had been Odalisques—had, also, made up a number in costumes not intended to be comic, but which had struck the sense of humour of one particular seaside town so that twice nightly a hoot of laughter from the gallery had greeted their appearance. The line had been led by Melody, clad in flapping gold elephants' ears head-dress, blotting-paper-pink tights, and that terrible concession to modesty, known as the leotard, finished off with gilded pectorals. Oh, but it was a wincing moment when the Twelve came on! Twice nightly Melody had set

her teeth over shrill feline greeting from the house. . . . In the same tour there had occurred the number that sent the girls strutting down the joy-board into the middle of the stalls, achieving a backbend half-way down, and warbling the American *chanson* "Louisville Lou," which begins—

"Folks, you've heard of scandalous vamps,
History is full of love-making champs!"

To the end of the tour not one of the twelve had known what was meant by the word "champ" . . .

It was on that tour, too, that the five had been known as Melody's Clique.

Melody, who, for all her shortcomings, had no bossiness in her, and who neither sought nor wished to take the lead, was (as I have already told you) somehow, and without realizing it herself, always the centre of the group. Don't ask me why; you yourself must know some of these centres of attraction? Possibly you yourself are one? Can you tell me why it could be thus, and why not some individual devastatingly superior? Quite unfairly, quite involuntarily, Melody with her superb health, her careless high spirits, her power of making the best of everything and of treating life as a joy-ride, Melody swayed her clique, from Cockney Ginger even unto Mamie the Australian, who had visited more continents than Melody had seen capitals, and who was, between ourselves, handicapped with a bosom so matronly and motherly that she herself owned to being over thirty.

II

At the top of the staircase the door opened. A head was thrust out; a shingle with just the colour and "line" of corrugated cardboard. A sharp voice called "Ready now!"

Immediately there was an upward surge of the entire Jacob's Ladder.

The voice snapped "Take your turn! Ten at a time, please!"

Which meant that Melody found herself in the last ten for the audition.

Now an audition has this in common with college and other examinations. Bright and shining lights of everyday work have been known to become, for these important occasions only, paralyzed and dumb. Such was Sybil of Melody's Clique. Sybil, who, asked to show what she could do, immediately froze into a hard-boiled pose, moved with creaky stiffness, and, for song, produced the croak of an asthmatic jackdaw. Poor little Sybil! But have no fear for her. The rest of her clique had none. They would have been ready to bet their first week's salary that Sybil would get taken on, and they knew why she would be chosen. Because of her radiant and authentic *fairness!* Sybil was fair as a lily, blonde as a duckling's back, the roots of her yellow hair were, if possible, fairer than the ends: and who can say fairer than that? Any manager, producer, or chorus-master will tell you that a fair head has exactly three times the chances of a dark one.

Anon; out came Sybil; slender body shaking, semi-

circle of little teeth-marks printed on her underlip, and on her white brow her victorious primrose curls matted with the dews of terror. It would take Sybil half-an-hour to regain her native perkiness after that nerve-shattering ordeal—by audition, and only those who knew her of old would ever have guessed that she had again got away with it, and that she was engaged for one of the Johnson Girls.

Engaged, too, was Ginger, the little Cockney boyette, who for any audition could assume as an extra garment a wan, deep-eyed street arab appeal, combined with a machine-like precision of step first practised to barrel-organs in her native slum off the Whitechapel Road.

Engaged, too, incredible as it seems considering her age, bust, and projecting front teeth was Mamie the Australian. You could not believe that dear old Mamie would get taken on anywhere, had you not, as you doubtless have, watched so many choruses displaying in their ranks at least one Mamie. Perhaps there is an advantage in being a type so well known?

Now as for Anne the Aristocrat, her success was not because of her voice, nor her refinement, nor yet her connections. It was her kick—this not in the slangy but in the literal sense; it was the peculiarly supple and lavish gesture of her right limb towards the stars. Her right, not her left. And why? Pure chance, ladies; an accident that had happened when Anne le Mesurier, now twenty-three, was nineteen. For two years before that she had been laboriously practising acrobatic dancing. One morning when forcing herself into the *grand écart* something, as she said, “went.” Some tendon? Some liga-

ment? A doctor would be able to tell you which. Anyhow, Miss le Mesurier had to be taken home to bed.

Interval of six weeks.

One convalescent morning Anne thought "Something must be done about this. The old supplies do not run to my resting another month. Dash it, I can't expect mother and the boys to *keep* me? I have simply got, yes, got to get up and practise my kicks." Setting her teeth, she got up, and thinking in pluck and desperation "It's bound to hurt like Hell; still, an inch at a time. Now for it; here goes!" and there went. Up, up flew her pyjama'd right leg; high, high, higher than Anne had ever kicked before. "Really, my dears, I thought it was never going to come down," Anne afterwards informed her friends, who for the rest of her career were to envy Anne's right-leg kick. It was the wonder of the audition room. "Yes, everybody's surprised. A gift, quite natural," Anne would modestly reply at the end of her audition dance, carefully arranged so that all the kicks fell to the right leg. The winning kick! . . .

Now, as for Melody at auditions, she resembled those candidates, male and female, who possess what is known as "The exam. head." The term's work bores these people. They toil not neither do they coach. They do not know what answers will be required to which questions, only *they know* that they will be stimulated as no strong wine could stimulate them, by the examination room atmosphere, by the sight of papers laid out, and by the sound of that warning croak—"You have fifteen, ten—*five more minutes!*"

Braced, exhilarated, thrilled—Melody with nine stran-

gers swung into the audition room to confront Fate in the shape of Mr. Johnson-Brown.

III

The shape of Mr. Johnson-Brown was that of any other unromantic, sedentary, and uninteresting little business-man, in horn-rimmed glasses. Normally, in a civilization of saner values, no young girl would give him a look. Unless she had happened to stumble over his boots in a tube lift or the gangway of a theatre, no girl would realize that the man was there. But as things are, and because of the curiously false values of our present civilization, this (and not some young Apollo mentally and physically gorgeous, vowed to high enterprise and adventure) was the man who was being continually sought out and flattered, entreated, followed about by the eyes of young and attractive girls, in sixteens, twenties, forties at a time. This apparent Nonentity was the Power who controlled their destinies. It was he who decreed where they were to live, in the tropics, in the suburbs, for how long, in comfort or the lack of it, with their people, among strangers. It was he who indirectly dispensed the background and colour of their young lives. Incidentally it was he upon whose verdict depended now the fate of young Keith Cartwright, Melody's lover. (Keith at that moment was in a shop off Jermyn Street, fingering light-weight khaki shirts. . . . His steady grey eyes, meeting those of a shop assistant, saw nothing but the dream-face of Melody—he heard nothing but the dream voice of Melody—“*I’ll let you know results at tea!*”)

IV

Thrilled, Melody in the audition room heard Mr. Johnson-Brown ask, "Now what have you done?"

"Ballet and troupe work." (Melody's warm joyous voice seemed to comment, "*both were the loveliest fun.*")

Behind the horn-rimmed goggles the little man's uninteresting (but unerring) eyes took in this girl's height and build. In a weary voice he said, "Well! get undressed, will you? and let's see what you can do."

Melody turned to the dressing-room, taking off her hat as she went, and showing her hair. Another noticeable thing about Melody, her perfectly modern hair, parted at the side, laid flat as a lounge lizard's to her head, and looking, from the front, like the world's most successful Eton crop. But when she turned, surprised! Her golden-brown hair showed, tightly twisted into a profuse knot at the back of her head. Usually she was the only long-haired girl in the room (she was now), yet she never looked frumpy. Even (don't ask me how) she managed to get hats of the day to fit her. With wigs, now, she was obliged to take more trouble. Odd, the pet anachronisms to which Moderns cling; some of them still giving up seats to old gentlemen in omnibuses, others never getting into the way of calling grandparents by Christian names. Cut her hair she would not; remaining, Melody and the Bun.

V

Thrilled, she came out to do her dance. Forgotten, all thought of poor Keith, her alternative job. Forgot-

ten, all worry because for six weeks she had been out of any job at all. She was full of the moment's stimulation, full of the chance, the fun of trying for it.

"What music do you want?" asked the pianist.

"Oh, any old foxtrot," said Melody blithely. "Have you got this one?"—she pursed her fresh lips together and whistled a tune then new to her—

"The kiss you miss
Is just the kiss
You never can forget—"

The pianist took it up; and there, before the eyes of Mr. Johnson, the corrugated cardboard lady, who as she afterwards heard was Miss Earwaker, the captain of the Johnson Girls, and half a dozen critically-gazing other girls, Melody danced.

Her feet, shod in her oldest, most reliable pair of pink ballet shoes, with frayed snub noses and resin stains, with criss-cross ribbons just a shade lighter pink than were her perfect ankles, pointed like a snail's seeking horn, rose, fell like a bird's throat in drinking, sprang across the boards, leapt crossing each other in the air. She danced up to the top of her form, but, if you have been misled into thinking that this is to be another history of a dancing star, read no further! It was now years since Melody herself, with a tinge of poised relentless clairvoyance which she owed to the French blood, had faced the fact that she was not destined to be one of those British who add "ova" to their names and who blaze among the Russians, brilliant as any.

"Never be any *celebrity*," flashed across her mind, even as her body brought, for a moment, reflections of Grecian beauty into a room off the London Strand. "Never a solo dancer! Not a hope, Melody. But as rank and file you're dashed good. Good enough for anywhere, any chorus, *I* should think!"

And so, from the other end of the room, thought Mr. Johnson-Brown. His eye, uninteresting and unerring, used to consider "a Girl" solely as a Johnson-Brown Girl, registered approval of this particular girl's appearance, and of the dress into which she had changed for the audition.

Actually, it was Melody's best swimming costume, composed of a sturdy white woven jumper with a goldfish embroidered on the breast, a belt of white plaited cord, and business-like black trunks that reached to mid-thigh.

"Good legs," registered the Johnson-Brown eye, and then the weary Johnson-Brown voice was raised in an abrupt "Right, that'll do."

The pianist stopped on a staccato note. There was one throbbing uncertain moment for Melody (did he mean he'd take her? did he not?) before he added almost irritably, "Take her name and address, Miss Earwaker, and give her a contract, will you?"

Melody had got her job. Thrilled, she did not even remember to think, "Poor old Keith, how am I going to tell him?"

CHAPTER III

THE SEND-OFF

*About how one man took refusal;
about a chorus girl's home; about
new moon wishes; and about
a strange sort of good-bye kiss.*

I

THE way Keith Cartwright took the news was this; he threw a party.

Yes. Outwardly cool, casual, and neo-modern as you like, that was *his* suggestion.

And what of its reaction upon Melody, who, as soon as she caught sight of his graceful grey-clad bulk, parked there where they'd arranged to meet for tea at the Piccadilly, had begun to feel nervous? It was the first time she had refused a proposal, for the good reason that this was the first offer of marriage the girl had had. Always she had imagined that it would be a "ghastly set-out" telling the man you found, after all, you couldn't do with him. She had heard other women talk about men who could not take "no" for an answer, and who pestered, and who got a girl into the state of mind of longing to throw things, to raise voices and stamp feet in order to underline that "*no*." She had heard of men who broke down and sobbed. . . . Wouldn't *that* be too awful? Also about men who wore a girl down so that from being kind and sorry the girl became impatient, unfeeling, and, finally, rude. Or, on the other hand, wore the girl down so that she sighed hopelessly at last, "Oh, very *well*." In any case, nothing (Melody had heard) could be as tiresome as a man just turned down. She made her way up to Keith's

table thinking, "Even if he doesn't do anything else, he will take the kick out of my having got the job." And lo, Keith did none of these things.

At once, relieving her of having to break it to him, he told her: "I see you've got that job, Melody. By the way, what is the job?"

She told him, to the accompaniment of other people's softened chatter, while at the other end of the tea room de Groot, stepping forth violin under chin, bow in hand, eyes far away, gave his most voluptuous rendering of "*Two Pretty Turtle-Doves*." Melody added gleefully: "Four pounds a week, Keith. I can save on that. I'm going to, this time. How did you guess I'd got taken on?"

"Saw in the tilt of your hat as you came in that you'd won. Who is this Johnson-Brown chap? Does he go with you?"

Melody told him more details; that wonderful Keith did not even seem relieved to hear what the Johnson-Brown chap was like. Detached and sporting, he was glad Melody had got a three months' certain good job in Paris, with girls she liked. That might have been all, from the breeze calling to breeze represented by Keith's manner. "Well, now look here, Melody." He paused, until the waiter, the tea, the toast, and the cress sandwiches had been arranged; then, without frills, he brought out: "Yes, you've won. Look here, this is what I was going to say. Supposing you'd lost—"

She had been going to say something about "frightfully sorry," but Keith had now got hold of the situation. He had dived through God knows what towering wave of bitterness, even in the moment that he saw Melody, head

in air, swing into the Piccadilly. He came out and up smiling. What else was there to do? "If we were just engaged, Melody, we should celebrate. Can't we celebrate anyhow?"

"What do you mean? Now?"

"No, no. Do it in style. Take the 'engagement' out of 'engagement-party,' I mean, and let me give you the party somewhere as a send-off."

"A *disengagement* party, Keith? Marvellous idea!" Melody said, relieved beyond power of words to convey. She had never liked him so much as she liked him for this one gesture.

II

The party, which was presently arranged to take place on the night before Melody and the rest of the Johnson-Brown Girls, including her Clique, went off to France, was to be a send-off not only for them but for Keith himself, who was sailing a day later for India. Bill Wynne, Melody's favourite brother, and Keith's best friend, arranged the plan of making it a co-operative affair. He and Keith were to go shares in food, drinks, smokes, new dance-records, and any surprise packets containing funny noses; and as Lilac Lodge, its garden and tennis-lawn, meant more space than they could afford anywhere else, let the parentings provide the premises.

Melody, whose manner to her rejected suitor remained that of breeze calling to breeze, so that not one of her family imagined that between these two there had happened anything so old-fashioned as a proposal, while her stepmother even thought, "*Why that girl doesn't set*

her cap at Keith Cartwright and manage to get properly engaged to him before he goes out to India, is what I cannot understand," was still an inward pæan of thankfulness. Splendid, that Keith had taken it thus. Unendurable, if Keith had continued to look as he'd looked on the bus—a boy smitten with a blindingly bad headache. . . . *Angel-Keith*, to wipe all the regret from the parting! She agreed that daddy would love a party at Lilac Lodge, and that though Steppy minded so many things, more scope to cope was certainly not one of them.

III

Steppy, who had been a Miss Miller, Melody's last governess, was a short woman with a once-pretty face of the Dresden-china type, and the mentality of the "minder" born. Also she was as practical, as radically conventional, and as apt to clamber up on her dignity and stand there bristling, as the Wynnes were happy-go-lucky, casual, and loth to take offence. They, like the Restoration poetess, *"could more easily forgive, than cause, an injury."* Looking at her in the middle of that tribe you marvelled how she came to be amongst them? Steppy sometimes saw people marvelling, and this was one of the things she "minded." She was fated to mind so many things about these leggy, laughing Wynnes—their unconventionality, jokes, frank discussions of the unmentionable, brand of slang, and friends; especially "poor Melody's *terrible* stage-friends." How she "minded" Melody's profession! (It wouldn't have mattered if she had been on the real stage; but to Steppy the word "chorus" meant precisely what it meant to our great-

aunts. I am gossiping to you about Steppy, because she was important in a way she did not fully realize. It was she who was responsible for Melody's choice of a career! "To stay much longer in a house with Steppy would send me stark staring mad," Melody had decided at fourteen. "What can I do? No good at anything much but dancing class. I'll polish that up. I've got to get a job, and that right early." She had set herself to it, worked hard, got round the Colonel (no herculean task for his favourite child), and had at the very first opportunity left house and home.

(Everybody who knew the Wynnes seemed to know why.)

Yet it was Steppy who kept Melody's room always in apple-pie order for the chorus girl's return. It was Steppy who ran inconvenient Lilac Lodge on oiled wheels for Colonel Wynne, that silver-moustached, easy-going Adonis in the mellowest of autumns. . . .

It was Steppy too who "coped" as no one else could have coped with the material details of the send-off supper party. Its suppressed emotions Keith was not to forget. . . .

What Melody was not to forget came at the end of that party.

Since that is its important point, let us pass quickly on to it; skipping introductions, Steppy's would-be kindness to, and silent comments on, Melody's "set," Colonel Wynne's genial detached ease; skipping the dancing, the tennis, the description of guests, whom we shall not again meet. Skip, too, the supper in the high-ceilinged Victorian dining-room, with all the holiday leaves slipped

into the mahogany table on which was arrayed the old Wynne silver, and the cut-glass salt cellars, and the centre-piece of eight-armed Sheffield candlesticks towering above massed lilac table-decoration and faultless tablecloth, drawn-thread-work hems and all. . . .

"Lord, from what a typical nineteenth-century home Keith's 'modern' Melody has sprung—and fled! The home, sweet home after which certain sentimentalists still yearn. They would give up labour-saving modernity, give up the Heal Touch, give up all grave artistic 'rightness' and H. G. Wells devices, if only they could call back the good, old-fashioned, fuggy, dust-harbours, microbesque, carpeted, curtained *comfort*, which took so much keeping up and keeping clean! No place like home . . . hot buttered toast . . . the children piling the chairs on to the tables to play at ships . . . where is now the merry party gathered round the Christmas fire . . . the family atmosphere! . . . What's the use of a home when we have no families any more? Nothing but twos and threes of highly specialized individuals. Atoms flung into the whirlpool, that's what we are."

These were the meditations of Mrs. Cartwright, Keith's novelist-mother. She, by the way, had a perfectly horrible time at the party—could she not read, through her son's bright face, into her son's ray-less despondency? But pass that. Pass on; there has been shown to you one chorus-girl's home and the people and circumstances responsible for her. You can now make up for yourselves the talk that filled the place? You can turn on the new gramophone records, manipulate the wireless when those tunes fail, take for granted the good-byes,

Colonel Wynne's, "Well, it's uncommonly pleasant having had all you young people together here to-night," and the "good-lucks" to the girls of the Clique. When, late, they (escorted by various men guests) at last left to catch their buses into town, they trooped through the garden and saw, hanging in the sky over the top of the lilacs, the sickle of a new moon slender as a wedding ring.

They all turned their money and "wished" in silence (else wishes do not come true); but shall I tell you the wishes of the Clique?

IV

Mamie, the Australian, wished that she might be married before the year was out to some nice reliable manly sort of a fellow, who would take care of a girl. Not one of those silly young boys who think the earth of themselves, but getting *on*; not too good-looking, needn't be rolling in money even, but just have a nice little home, outside Sydney perhaps, just comfortably off so that a girl wouldn't have to worry any more. . . .

The Cockney Ginger, who, like all the tribe of Ginger, was always of two minds, couldn't decide whether she wished that something reel romantic like on the films would happen to her in Paris, or that she'd meet some very old gentleman with sixty thousand a year who'd take a fancy to her? In the end she wished for a fur coat; chinchiller.

Fair-haired Sybil wished she could stop getting the wind up at auditions.

Anne le Mesurier, first wishing that she could kick

with her left leg as high as she could with her right, hastily corrected this to wishing that some unknown millionaire would leave his fortune so that she need never more lift either leg higher than to step into her Rolls Royce. Driving off to the rue de la Paix for a fitting. . . . The biggest dress-designer's choicest model! . . . Wearing which, Anne could meet and be immediately proposed to by some attractive Lord Somebody-or-other . . . dreamed Anne. A real lord; not just a "creation," but somebody whose ancestors were making English history while his ancestresses were making Bayeux tapestry! No extra charge for a real fat wish while you're about it; and then good-bye forever to these questions about what my *real* name is, dam' their insulting *nerve*, thought touchy Anne.

Melody?

"I don't know what to wish for," she told Mrs. Cartwright, a tall, rather dimmed-looking, but watchful lady. "I seem to have got everything, don't I? I wanted this job in Paris, and I'm off to it to-morrow, with the girls. I don't seem to have anything left to wish for."

"Can new moon wishes be passed on? Anyhow, give me your wish, and I'll use it for you, Melody," smiled Keith Cartwright's mother, who had been praying all that evening, "God help my boy!"

V

New moon or no new moon, Keith Cartwright went on wishing what he had been wishing all the evening. He wished that he could kiss Melody. Just once, so that she would remember it. That wish never left him. . . .

Nobody would have imagined it from his manner at the party, or by the way he had gone about for the last week, looking fit and full of beans as usual. Who would have thought he had received anything like a blow . . . not to say a blow over the heart?

You see, that was Keith's way of being in love.

Any fever that possessed him, that kept him revved up and restlessly tossing on his bed at night, and that by day drove him hither and thither from this crowd of people to the other, into shops, clubs, anywhere where he met acquaintances, just because he could not endure to remain for two minutes alone, listening to his own thoughts in his own ears, meeting with his mind's eye a wide sweet untroubled stare, and muttering to himself like a man in delirium, "Melody, Melody! Oh, girl, girl, don't you, can't you, couldn't I make you?" Any and all this driving energy Keith had put into his arrangements for Melody's send-off party; marking out the Lilac Lodge tennis courts, acting as transport with the little Aero-Morgan presently to be handed over to Bill, and hanging the whole of the blossoming garden with those great big pink Chinese lanterns which were to be the illumination to his good-bye.

For at last everybody had gone but Keith and his mother. Mrs. Cartwright was putting on her wrap in the high-ceilinged spare-room, and listening to Steppy on Melody.

"Such a *pity* she could not go in for something else, Mrs. Cartwright. What men will she ever meet on this Paris job? You can't count foreigners as men, of course. . . . Girls must have something to do, of course; makes

them more self-respecting; but time goes on, and I think men are getting tired of girls on the stage. I think Melody would have done better to go in for teaching dancing. She is quite good-looking in that *big* way, but I think it handicaps a girl to be seen with such common friends. . . . My husband doesn't seem to mind *what* Melody does, he simply says, 'Oh, Melody will come out all right!' Sometimes I think men don't imagine anything but the right things can happen to *their* daughters. . . . Do you know, Mrs. Cartwright, my husband didn't even seem to mind those terrible cockney accents? Sometimes I think men can't *notice* whether or not a woman talks like a *lady!*"

"One imagines they can't notice," agreed Mrs. Cartwright, without irony. She was sorry for the fussy, dumpy little second wife who (as she guessed) adored Colonel Wynne as whole-heartedly as Keith adored Melody. Colonel Wynne, who repaid her with non-chalant affection and a "most efficient little woman, my wife!" and then gave any love worth having to his memories and his children. . . . What a disastrous family!

Melody meanwhile had run down the garden at the back of the house. Here in the tall brick wall there was a door leading to the short cut across the common where lived Bill's Doreen. Bill was going to escort his lady home. Melody had brought the door key and had let out the engaged couple.

VI

Things were all cross-wise there again! Bill's Doreen had shown no glimpse of party spirit during the whole

of the send-off. Hers had been the only unsmiling face at the supper party. She would not dance. The whole truth was that the girl was again distraught with brooding misery. For the first time during her engagement she had cause for jealousy; not of family, clubs or sports, but of other girls. All those cats of show girls, according to Doreen, had been making eyes at Bill. Bill encouraging them! What did Bill mean by saying he must manage to nip over for a week-end to Paris?

"Why, to see Pug-face," Bill Wynne replied, perfectly sincerely. Pug-face had been his earliest name for his younger sister; it had indeed burst from him with his first sight of Melody as a baby.

"Oh, that sounds convincing!" Bill's betrothed had retorted. "And what about making eyes back at that red-haired little guttersnipe?" Doreen's own dark eyes were heavy with unshed tears. "Or was it the very fair one, almost an Albino, that you liked?"

"What on earth's biting you, Doreen? I liked them all."

"I know. That," said Doreen, veering off on to her more usual tack, "is the trouble. All you Wynnes are the same. Colonel Wynne! You! Melody! All the married ones, too, that I've seen. People fall crazily in love with your whole family. And you? . . . you just coolly *'like'* everybody. Some day, perhaps, somebody will wake up some of you, make you jolly well suffer as I do. I wish I were dead. Perhaps in Paris there'll be some man who will show Melody what it means to wish that. I can imagine a man wanting to catch hold of Melody and

strangle her. . . . Yes, as much in love with her as that!"

"Sounds dashed affectionate," laughed Bill Wynne.

"You don't understand. Keith does. I'm sure Keith wishes he were dead to-night, too."

"What are you gabbling about, my dear?" amicably from Bill, as he strode at her side across the common. "What earthly diff. can it make to Keith if Pug-face is dashing off to gay Paree? Course I know old Keith is rather keen on the wench, but he, lucky bargee, is off on this absolutely gilt-edged job for three mortal months. Heaps of other things for Keith to think about. Interesting, too. What's *his* grouse?"

What answer was there? Only a stifled sob that Bill did not hear, and would not have understood. . . .

VII

Equally unstirred by any touch of passion, Bill's sister was then thinking, "Lord, how I'd hate to be as keen on any one as Doreen is on Bill, if that's what makes her look so devastated? I suppose Doreen can't help it, but I can't imagine the state of mind in which one doesn't *do* something to help it," thought Melody, and turned on the path to find that Keith had joined her in the dusky breathing garden.

Just here there was plenty of light for them to see each other. The sky still held lingering daylight and a flash of sunset, there was also the warm russet distant blur above London. From over the wall the white electricity of street lamps mingled with the warm radiance of four great Chinese lanterns hung in the lilac above Mel-

ody like tethered, swaying full moons. Plenty—even too much light, thought Keith, as they greeted each other, Melody with her usual generous, dimply, passenger-on-life's-joy-ride smile; Keith with his lips, not with his eyes.

“Well, Melody?”

“Well, Keith? It was a lovely party.” She thought for the twentieth time, “*Pet*, to give a party instead of attempting to throw the heavy lovelorn swain! Really if one *had* to be married, one might do worse than Keith and no frills? I’d like a spot of frills first, myself,” thought the girl, who was conscious of the world’s thirst for romance, even though she was still asleep to the world’s hunger for passion. She thought, “I shall like Paris better, though, than tying myself up with any love-affair at all. I don’t believe Keith is so devastated. His life is pretty full of other things when all’s said. Decent of him to be so jolly with the girls.” She said, aloud, “Keith, everyone had a marvellous time!”

“So glad.” He said it casually. Despairingly, he thought: “If I could kiss her, once, properly, so that she’d remember that while I’m away!”

Pause.

Boom-m-m—a cockchafer planed by them, and rose above the lilacs. Dark purple by day, those lilacs were now fragrant pyramids of inky black, save where, catching the rosy lantern light, the cliffs of foliage and bloom looked like a romantic stage set for some second act; the flowers still gave out scent of the sun’s caress. Foliage stirred in rising night breeze. Every leaf whispered to heart-shaped leaf.

Boom! droned that cockchafer above them. Cling, clang, cling! sounded from the High Street trams. From the house floated down Mrs. Cartwright's one call of "Keith!"

Again the breeze rippled over the lilacs, leaf whispered to heart-shaped leaf. The unbearable, peaceful, lovely tension was cut by Keith's:

"Well, I suppose I've got to start up the car and take mother back to Hampstead. Coming up now, Melody?"

"Hadn't we better put out these lanterns?"

"Oh, yes. I forgot. But don't. Do that when I'm gone, do you mind?"

He had the absurd idea that he could not bear to see Melody putting out one by one those rosy lights. He would feel as though she were extinguishing every light in his heart. Perhaps it was a pity he did not say so.

What he said was, "You see I've got to hurry. I'll leave you to do the lanterns if you don't mind. Sorry I can't manage to turn up and see you all off at Victoria to-morrow." He spoke as he had spoken to her before other tours. "All the best, and that."

"The same to you, my dear. I do hope you have a wonderful time among your rajahs, and that you'll love India, and do yourself no end of good with the firm, and come back to England, home and beauty stuffed with interesting experiences, and all that sort of thing. You'll tell me how you get on; write to the Arabesque, won't you?"

The man who loved her so could read out of her tone that she was as far away from him now as if she were already in Paris. She was already in Paris. She was at

the Arabesque, she was all swallowed up in a new life, cared for nothing but the new interests. Thrilled, suspenseful, delighted, she was turning towards the thoughts of the new venture. "Good night, Keith! Good-bye."

"Er—," said Keith Cartwright with death in his heart, and with every expression of what he felt frozen midway in his throat, "Er—, you're going to let me kiss you good night, I assume? Or won't you, now?"

"Don't be silly. Why not? Of course, I will, if you want me to. Don't I— Haven't I always?" said Melody, wheeling promptly.

Any of the other Johnson-Brown girls might have told her that a kiss that is talked about beforehand is not worth kissing. Not that this lore would have conveyed much to Melody. In any case, as she had just pointed out, it was not as though she had never before been kissed by Keith, this being after all the reign of King George the Fifth, when the kiss as greeting seems to have regained the place which it occupied in Tudor times.

Some people think this is a pity. Because, say they, it has taken away the glamour of the lover's kiss. But (others declare) one might just as well complain that the prevalence of chalk in certain neighbourhoods prevents one finding there any good cheese? In other words, to say that the casual comrade's kiss takes away anything from the lover's, is equivalent to thinking it is a pity when apples are plentiful, as that inevitably destroys the taste of a peach.

To return to this instance. Dozens of times Keith had kissed Melody, taking it as thanks for birthday or Christ-

mas presents, or for "so long" because he was going into camp for a fortnight with Bill and his Territorials, or for "how do you do" because he had just got back from his holiday, or for congratulations because Melody had pulled off another job; once because, as he said, it was "Amami night"; and, always, anyhow, as a matter of course, Melody knew the texture of Keith's smooth cheek as well as she knew the rougher feel of Bill's, darkest of her brothers. She was perfectly familiar with Keith's pleasant mingled aura of a blonde, well-groomed, out-of-door man who uses sandalwood shaving soap and smokes Egyptian cigarettes. Nobody at any time need mind kissing Keith.

She raised her face: and suddenly he took a step nearer to her, his arm shot out, and she was held close against a heart that went as though Keith had been running hard. Then it was that the unexpected happened. Standing within the circle of a man's magnetism, the girl was suddenly taken aback, sensing a panic new. *Keith cared?* As badly as that? Why. . . . Why, perhaps he could make her care. . . . The garden for an instant faded out. Holding her breath, Melody thought. . . . Perhaps he's going to make one feel he's mentally an attractive stranger, just as that morning one took him for some young man one had never met. . . . Keith! if you could kiss one, for once, differently, perhaps. . . . The unexpected happened. Melody, with her mouth lifted for that kiss, heard Keith say, in a voice that did not seem to be his, "No! I won't. I can't. I'm not going to kiss you good night." And he let her go.

VIII

Now the extraordinary part about this (Melody thought about it quite late into the night as one is often wakeful the night before an important journey), the odd and haunting part of this was that though Keith had said so huskily, so desperately, "I won't kiss you, I can't kiss you," at that very same moment he had held her, not only with his arms, but with his eyes. There, standing between the shifting lantern light and the shifting lilac shadows, he had looked down so straight into her own eyes that he had made Melody feel exactly as if he *were* kissing her. Kissing her as she had never been kissed before. Kissing her all over in a way she could not banish from her mind. . . .

("The kiss you miss, is just the kiss you never can forget. . . .")

One would later, of course. . . . Soon there would be mounds of things to banish from one's mind that disengagement party, that Lilac-look, and everything to do with England, home and Keith.

But, even as Melody thought this, something half realized prompted her: "You will never forget. Never, quite! Somehow, you will find it has altered things. Somehow you will find that you will never be able to think of Keith in the same way again. If he'd known what to do, he could not have done better. Somehow, it will make you look for the man's letters, wait for his return. And listen! listen! Would you not be sorry if Keith did not come back to look at you again like that?"

"Oh, shut up," snapped Melody, and turned her pillow so that it might be cooler to her cheek.

She began thinking again. "To-night there seemed so little between Keith and my being actually *keen* about Keith! If he would only have ever *done* something different. . . ."

"What did you expect him to do?" she asked herself.

"Can't think," she told herself. "Too exasperating the way one never can sleep for excitement the night before one's got to catch an early train. . . ."

"I wonder what Paris is going to be like. . . ."

"Keith. . . ."

"Paris! . . ."

"Keith . . ." was her last thought before she went to sleep.

PART II

AT THE FRENCH MUSIC HALL

CHAPTER IV

ONE OF THE CHORUS

*About the several cities of Paris;
about what it means to be a girl;
about a fortune-teller's glimpse into
the future; about stars and flypapers;
and about a feud between the two*

I

THEN came taking up the new job in Paris. "*Paris!* But how lovely for her . . ." One can hear it said in tones of envy, prompted by such different points of view, for Paris is not one but several cities, and which you visit depends upon whom you happen to be. You people who long to spend days exploring Old Paris, Paris of the antiquarian and the archæologist, lingering in its museums, staring at façades of its half-forgotten palaces, diving into its ancient grey churches . . . you need not envy Melody Wynne, she saw nothing of this Paris save for one hasty pilgrimage up the hill to the Church of the Sacred Heart. Hither she went for the sake of a long-ago visit with her French grandmother to this same place. Caves of incense-perfumed velvet gloom, she found; great radiant flowers of stained glass, amber splashes from altars pointed with taper-lights . . . all just the same as fifteen years ago. She had a memory of grandmaman's voice, in rapid whispered French, "Look, little Mélodie! See how the stands for candles are like people's hearts; some burn with rows of ardent wishes still. Others are burnt out. They show nothing but the spikes that once

held such bright tapers . . ." Fifteen years ago she had said that, half to herself, half to the child whose hand she held. ("Make thy curtsey, Mélodie.") "Pretty French Grannie," thought Melody, standing in the velvet taper-lit gloom. It was thick with incense. Mass was being said; deep-toned murmuring sounded at the High Altar. "I wonder if *she* can remember anything, wherever she is now. Of course Daddy once said French Grannie 'would always be somewhere about as long as I walked the earth.'" Deep-toned murmuring sounded from the High Altar; then a woman's voice, clear—"Have mercy on us!" Melody whispered a word, made her curtsey, passed out through the great door, out of velvet gloom into the light dazzle of the Montmartre heights, where the perpetual building and rebuilding clangs and hammers and echoes—and that was all she was to see of *that* Paris . . .

As for the "Paris" meant by those of you whose tastes run to her galleries, picture-dealers, arrogant little art-shops in the rue Buonaparte or the Boulevard Raspail, art-classes, studio life . . . there was none of this either for Melody. She never once set foot in the echoing Louvre; nor passed through the tree-ey gardens where children play to visit the Luxembourg, to gaze in surprise at the portraits of those composed un-made-up, full-bosomed ladies in ample clothes, by artists who (even if they did not always "get" what they thought they had got) did at least know for what they were aiming and do not betray that restless and Futurist *indecision*, or to admire the works of Degas that give the dancer on the stage as not even the canvases of Laura Knight have

given her to the world. A coloured picture postcard she found of that ballet-skirted dancer; arms out as if to embrace the joy of movement, body poised on one pink-sheathed limb, black velvet neck-ribbons a-flutter behind the flung-back head. This she sent to Keith, and that was that, as the Ancients said. You, when you go, will seek the Rodin Museum where the sculptor's nymphs prove that marble can be made to look as if it were soft as petals to the touch; there is a water nymph with just the eager seeking untried gaiety of Melody Wynne upon her marble face. . . . Melody never saw her, nor the angular modernities of the Salon d'Automne, nor anything for which you of the "artistic" leanings will make a bee-line when you get to Paris. . . .

Again as for that "devine" Paris which means fashions, beauty-pamperings, the ateliers, and the mannequin-parades of world-famous dress-makers, this too remained a closed book to Melody. She and lovely clothes were fated to remain strangers; let me tell you that she continued to array her form (that Rodin might have been pleased to perpetuate in marble) in her two-guinea coat and "any little" shift of tricot, washing silk, or cotton that she had found to fit her in Shaftesbury Avenue or the regions round about Oxford Street. Except for flamboyant stage costumes issued (in forties) to the Johnson-Brown girls Melody never put on a Paris frock, and as far as she was concerned the names of Patou, Yteb, Irfé and the rest might have belonged to so many breakfast foods. . . .

As far as she was concerned, too, the lovely country that grows so close outside Paris might never rustle or

gleam. For her there were no expeditions into its forests; no Fontainebleau, no Saint-Cloud, no brook-cooled Grez—even, no terraced, haunted, flowery Versailles!

What was there, then? (You may well ask.) What on earth did the girl see of Paris (pet-named "The Gay City")? Why, just one corner of the rue Chaussée d'Antin, where in a small and not too fragrant hotel, she and her Clique managed to crowd in all together, and where she shared a room at a hundred and twenty francs a week with Anne le Mesurier. (Ginger and Sybil shared the next room; across the corridor from them a small cubby-hole proved rather a tight fit for Mamie the Australian and all the mascots and photographs with which she always "tried to make her room look a bit like home.") What else of Paris? Just the cobbled hill up which they climbed to the Boulevard Clichy, and the blatantly new Amusement-Palace of which the façade looked like some brand new wedding cake plumped down in the middle of a dark dingy kitchen, and over the blazing entrance of which was to wink that semi-circle of bright letters spelling the name "Arabesque." Just the dressing-room, the wings, and the stage of that place, nothing else for at least a strenuous fortnight.

Ça, c'est Montmartre was the show in rehearsal.

It meant rehearsing, and rehearsing, and again rehearsing, for what seemed thirty-six hours a day. Weary meticulous repetition of each number, drill, nerve-racking series of alteration after alteration, the whole forming the skeleton framework on which, presently, there would appear the finished structure of the revue that was to be the success of Paris.

The star Arabesque worked for that; and how she made her companies work! They were so many prisoners, cooped up in that corner of the theatrical world, and sentenced to hard labour—as well as fines. . . .

II

Les Girls! Les Girls Anglaises!

That was the call for Melody Wynne and her mates in France.

Not only the Forty Johnson-Brown Girls, but the various uncounted troupes of Gayton Girls, Brighton Belles, the Twelve Prettigirls, and all the others that fly over to the Continent like flocks of pink-and-white migratory birds. Every Parisian music-hall has a "Girls" number, "Girls" are to be found in every first-rate casino as well as in every pathetic little touring-company of France.

"No dancers like the English" remains the verdict of so many French managers. And, apart from any technical superiority she may show over her stage-sister of Latin blood, the average English girl has a pull with the average French audience. In her Anglo-Saxon length of limb, carelessness, wholesomeness, radical "harmlessness," the French spectators find the exotic charm of the Unfamiliar. Their French girls are more animated, more vivacious, more provocative—but their vivacity is native, accustomed; and ah! that persistent daisy-like quality which we British take for granted in a girl, how it tells among those dark, heavy-scented petunias of Latins!

"Les Girls!"

Down the dingy stairs to the wings they troop, twitter-

ing their alien speech, and though to our ears the tossed-off exclamation may be the most ordinary bit of stage slang, to some of these French theatre folk it appears a gem of purest ray serene, to be repeated, learnt, treasured, as were some of the songs of Les Girls' elder brothers, Les Tommies in the trenches. "*Ils sont les gens si gais*," reported the young French officer of his first experience in an English mess. "Such merry people!" It is the same thing with the Girls, whose smile has been compared with an open bowl of cream. They can remain lavish and gay for all the driving hard work which they take seriously, but without that concentrated pre-occupation with salary which hardens eyes and lips of even the youngest French music-hall artist. How much of this is a question of nationality? It is only partly because their pay is more. . . .

"Ah, what one has to pay for these girls! The eyes out of one's head, and then needs well that one always has the eyes on them!" scolded the Star, who for this reason occupied the dressing-room opposite those apportioned to Les Girls. "Late, always late! If I did not fine them always ten francs never a girl would come exact to the rehearsal. And careless with their make-up for the scene! Again if they were not given *amende* for being insufficiently made-up, these demoiselles would make their entrance on the scene with the faces completely nude. If they were French girls I smack their face!" (No English girl had yet had her face smacked.) "And dirty, dirty, dirty," rose the next accusation against the Anglo-Saxon; "no French girl dares to crease and

dirty me her costume as do these sacred Johnson-Brown English Girls!"

Perhaps small wonder if the girls of Melody's troupe did find it hard to keep those costumes in pristine freshness and crispness. The Forty Johnson-Brown Girls took part in no fewer than ten numbers of the mammoth revue, *Ça, c'est Montmartre*, the best-known of these being that Hawaiian Moonlight Dance, and their Crinoline Kisses. Ten changes of costume a night, with many of the costumes or crinolines of a voluminous type; the cartwheel black Spanish hats, the feathered Redskin head-dresses, the flower-basket skirts, and the proud rose-pink crinoline—which was Melody's favourite costume from the first time it was issued to her by Madame Caldý, the pegtop-shaped, excitable wardrobe mistress (who was the wife of Monsieur Caldý the stage manager, and who, though for fifteen years she had worked with him under the same managements, had not exchanged a single word with him for the last five years). Twenty times in an evening the Johnson-Brown Girls had to slip their hard-working young frames in and out of these ten costumes. The Girls were eighteen to a dressing-room; each dressing-room possessing two overworked, underslept, black-clad Frenchwomen, paid eight francs per night to hurry to the call of "*Habilleuse!*" to unfasten, and to sling up to the roof of the corridor outside those dressing-rooms, the huge theatrical bell skirts which must hang there between the turns, like vast and tropic blooms.

Rehearsal, rehearsal, and more rehearsal for the girls. Their dancing represented, of course, one feature only of

the lavish attractions. Were there not the trained cobras? The grotesque dwarf acrobats? The spectacular decoration of Godiva Girls? But above all there was the climax of the show, the long-established idol of Paris, the rival of Mistinguett, the owner of Europe's loveliest legs, and of a name so famous that it was an admitted homage that not the youngest girl in her chorus addressed Arabesque with a "Madame" in front of her name.

It was during one afternoon's rehearsal that Melody Wynne first encountered her brilliant chief. And it was no auspicious first time either.

III

Melody Wynne, who for all her vitality was for once in her life dog-tired, was leaning her long back up against a slat when it suddenly rocked as though by an earthquake, causing her to start aside and look round.

"Say, did I hurt you?" exclaimed a voice of American intonation, and out from behind the Hawaiian scenery came a tall young man with a shiny black head and a well-waisted form, clad in a dove-grey jacket suit that seemed to have been cut by a glove-maker rather than by a man's tailor. This lounge lizard appeared on programmes as Orville K. Kent. He had acted in films—cowboy and riding stunts, but now partnered the *grande Arabesque* in her dances.

Already Melody had heard all sorts of contradictory stories about him. The *grande Arabesque* had acknowledged to someone that this Orville was her only son . . . Contradicted by the legend that Arabesque had never heard of him until one day, going into a small cinema,

she had seen him in a picture, taking an insignificant part, had fallen in love with his slender muscularity, and had cabled to Hollywood an offer for him to join her cast. On setting eyes upon him in the flesh—or rather in the fashionable lack of flesh—she had become so infatuated with him that she vowed he should never leave her, even if she had one day to marry him and to make him her co-director. A third story was that Arabesque took him specially as a foil to her own personality, and her own dancing; he was adequate, and he was safe. Orville K. might imagine that he would some day outshine her; this, however, was a laughable fallacy. Precious good care was taken by Arabesque never to have a dancing partner with whom there was any danger of *that* happening! And so on, and so forth. . . . This was the young man of whom Melody was suddenly given this close-up. To her, that was what he appeared. This Close-up, this Movie! She did not even ask herself what the handsome “movie” was like, “off!”

As for Orville K. himself, to whom women had come to mean the love-letter-writing sex, the picture-palace public, the sickening fools upon whom one's living depended, he was suddenly jolted for a moment, just as the bit of scenery had been jolted. He realized that this kid into whom he had bumped, and who smiled upon him in that unimpressed friendly manner (“Perfectly all right, you didn't hurt me!”) was mighty attractive. “Why, I'm glad that's so. I wasn't thinking where I was going, I guess,” said the male star, in a manner that did not quite match his polished and perfumed and gleaming and glittering appearance. It was so much simpler

than you would have expected. It was more "genuine cowboy" than *film-cowboy*, the gesture with which he, bringing out an expensive cigarette case, proffered it to the *Girl Anglaise*.

Instantly from the other side of the stage came a peremptory, resonantly Frenchy English cry of "Darling! Darrrr-leeng!"

"Pardon me," said Orville K. Kent hurriedly, and suddenly was no more at Melody's side, was already on the other side of the stage, drooping over a woman who had not before appeared there; a short russet-haired woman who moved in a swing of fringy kilts. There was a peremptory lift of the russet head, a whisk of the creamy fringy kilts, an order which sent the tall young man into the wings behind her.

"Who's that?" asked Melody of Miss Earwaker, Captain of the Johnson Girls.

"Haven't you seen her pictures, girl? They're everywhere, God knows. That's Arabesque."

"That?"

And, upon the beautifully-dressed slightly top-heavy figure that had been high up the rungs of Fame's ladder before Melody could walk across her baby-pen, the new-comer turned her stare, exclaiming, "Isn't she *ugly*?"

"Don't let her hear you."

Arabesque had not heard. Unfortunately, however, she had seen her good-looking American dancing-partner smiling, proffering the cigarette-case which had been a present from herself, speaking to one of her chorus. . . .

Later, when the Girls were again at their endless drill,

Arabesque shot a piercing look at the front row. Peremptorily she ordered "You zere . . . *You!*"

Tall Anne, who was first from the left, nudged her friend. Melody took a step forward.

"Kip in your pless," rapped out Arabesque with feline swiftness. "Kip in line." Two V-shaped lines of pink English faces remained blank as rows of sweets in a box. "Zis trouble I 'ave wiz you English girls is more zan you are wort'. And, listen, one zing I will not 'ave."

Pause. A bright grey glance swept the line so that, as was afterwards said, "It was a marvel she didn't sweep every scrap of red off our lips with her eyes!"

"I will not 'ave you English girls shove yourself forward and ruin look of line behind me. You are zair so zat I sing in front of you. Kip in you pless all. Especially you, Number Two. Pity zey must 'ave you in front, you big English one."

This trifling incident was the beginning of unacknowledged feud.

But immediately after Melody's telling off, the Johnson-Brown Girls did at last receive their dismissal for the day.

IV

Their place was taken, for position, by a troupe of girls who as a rule got only one call to three calls of the dancers, since they were that special feature of the Paris Music Hall—the Godiva Girls.

As you will gather from their name, this feature cost, for costumes, less than any other artiste, and people of a certain mentality experience a certain sense of satisfy-

ing indignation over the mere thought that Godiva Girls are to be seen in Paris. "Disgraceful. Disgusting, I call it," Melody's step-mother had declared, bristling. "Awful creatures! How they ever have the face—" (Bill Wynne had to be hastily suppressed from pointing out to Steppy how inappropriate was her last remark, also that perhaps it was not the awfulness of the girls that caused them to take up that job. It would have been no good discussing that with Steppy.) Then there are the schoolboys of fifty and over who delight in the idea that one could not take one's mother or one's wife to see such-and-such shows, they would be so shocked at the Godiva Girls.

Now, do you know, they would be right to be shocked?

Many of these girls were harmless as Eve on creation's morning. Many of them were work-girls from hat shops or laundries. Rumour, too, had it that amongst them were several very hard-up girl students who helped thus to keep themselves and to pay their fees at *cours* on the other side of the Seine. So many expenses for the Godiva Girls! It is true that they did not cost much to the management in dresses, but they cost themselves much in make-up. It was one of those ten-franc fines if they skimped their wet-white. Ten francs out of the pockets of their everyday clothes.

For Mademoiselle Phryne and the other nineteen Godiva Girls, theatres are kept at conservatory temperature; it is only going out into the rain and gales of Montmartre, summer and winter, that, even when wrapped up again in their overcoats and their cheap furs, brings risk of pneumonia. Will you remember that next time you see

a production with a Godiva Girls number? Then, whether they pose as ivory idols, as living Grecian friezes, as Egyptian reliefs, let it remind you how much has to be given per bottle for stage liquid white. Remember their pay for the job—fifteen shillings a week. Remember how they have to eke it out and get themselves fed by sewing in hat-linings, by pleating skirts all day. Then you may continue to be shocked at the idea of Godiva Girls, but perhaps in a different way?

v

Late, late, the Clique straggled for dinner into their favourite Montmartre restaurant. It was a small eighteenth-century eating-place, which is to be found on the left of the Place du Tertre as you climb up that last lap towards the Church of the Sacré Cœur.

Chez la Mère Catherine they found two low rooms made very "peasant" with sanded floor, and with the same red check material used for table-cloths, napkins, wall-hangings, and valances for the shelves on which stood row after row of old French wine jugs. The pictures in the place were all original sketches, signed by the artists (many of them being caricatures of the restaurant's owner, the Mayor of Montmartre), and the food was good, plentiful, and not too dear.

Nodding to the cheerful landlord, the Clique passed the bar, passed between the tables occupied only by French people, and found, already occupying the bench against the wall near the inner room, a friend with whom they often dined, as he was Anne le Mesurier's very particular friend.

Anne the aristocrat had not yet been introduced to her Lord Anybody, nor had she inherited anyone's millions, but she had been pleased enough to find, among *Les Boys* (that group of young Englishmen whose stock-in-trade was figures and voices) an old fellow-student from the Academy of Dramatic Art, called Teddy Marvell. Teddy's people were well-off bankers in the South of France. Teddy himself (Eton and, for a briefer period, Christchurch) was one of the exceptions to the rule that while a young woman who goes on the Stage becomes more woman, her male relative who takes up a dramatic career becomes somehow and vaguely less of a man. Teddy remained masculine enough—though a masculine edition of Anne—which gives the lie to your theory that people are attracted to and by their opposites only.

Teddy and Anne were alike tall, slim, "superior," touchy, loathed by strangers though gladly suffered by those who knew them. A nice boy, Teddy, his "crush" on Anne was genuine enough. So was the brotherly palin-ness (impossible of comprehension to a young Frenchman of his standing) which he extended to Anne's girl friends.

"Good evening, ladies—and Hanne," he greeted the Girls. "Which of you has been getting my poor superseded Sex into hot water now? . . . Why, Orville K. I heard Her Highness giving him merry Hell at the end of the rehearsal, when I was passing her dressing-room door. Gad, I wouldn't be him for all his publicity and twice his salary. That poor devil daren't lift one of those eyelashes at anyone else! Terrific dressing-down about his not having been taken on at her theatre in order

to make the amiable with one of the chorus." . . . He smiled, but there was a smoulder of jealousy at the back of it. Jealousy, curse of the world, had brought about more than one "misunderstanding" with Teddy's touchy love. "'One of the chorus.' That you by any chance, Anne darling?"

"No, darling, it was *not* me!"

"No, darling, it was only me," Melody reassured him, as they fell upon their food, with the keenest appetites in the world, that is, the appetite of dancers.

And now that party of one English Boy and five English Girls at that corner table, became aware of a slightly eerie-looking being who will now for a few moments take up our attention.

He manifested himself first as an insinuatingly soft, foreign, musical voice ordering an absinthe. Looking up they perceived a Vandyck hat and a voluminous cape, between which appeared hanks of long black hair, and a pallid, degenerate, Red Indian profile.

"How terribly Latin Quarter," murmured Anne to Teddy, who murmured back, "How marvellously Henri Murger, and La Bohême."

The man, with superhuman swiftness, absorbed his absinthe, and, as he ordered another, looked up to catch in a softly sticky brown glance the glances from the next table.

He smiled, and then in good but alien English said, "I am a fakir. Perhaps I might be allowed the privilege of looking into the future for these *demoiselles*?"

To such a question, from such an audience, there is only one answer.

Eagerly they clustered closer.

"A fakir? Does he mean a clairvoyant? Oh, do! Oh, let him tell our hands. Oh, rather! All have a look into the future."

"It is as a rule thirty francs that I receive," hinted the insidious voice, but the fakir consented to read, for ten francs each, for those of the profession which of all others in the world is enslaved to the god of chance.

"I read by the hand, please. But first some divine fluid, the fluid necessary to inspire."

Another absinthe. The group of young English clustered closer like fielders at a cricket match where the batsman is expected to give a near catch. The brown glance seemed to thread those young faces on a string. Scarcely necessary to scan their hands. One had but to listen to the questions with which they plied him.

"Can you tell me how long this show will run? . . . I've always refused to tour, was that a mistake?"

"Should I have done better to have taken up singing?"

"Look here, when *am* I going to play Shakespeare parts?" This, of course, was Teddy, who could always see himself as Romeo; *as* for Hamlet in modern dress, well, of course, darling, all that was the tragedy of his life (he couldn't even begin to tell Anne about what had happened there!).

"When I marry and settle down—"

"It'll be in this country, won't it?" (This was from Mamie; Romance was coming Mamie's way, and her hopes of a home of her own had risen. She had been commanded to go to the dentist, who appeared to be "a perfectly sweet fellow" called Pierre Dupont, who couldn't

take too much trouble for Mamie. Already her front teeth projected less, and she preened over the still projecting less, as the fakir told her she would marry a gentleman of Paris.)

After which he turned to Melody Wynne; and, listen! As she listened, as they all listened, for she was to remember his words. It was odd, that which he told Melody.

He began. "Mademoiselle has been, and is, beloved. By one now far over the sea."

"Coo! Smart of 'im, isn't it?" breathed Ginger, the Clique's baby, as superstitious a little theatrical as ever set foot in powder upset over a dressing-room floor. "That Keith, that oo 'e means. Get on with it, will you? When's she going to marry him?"

But the fakir ignored this red-haired *gosse*. He leant over the table to scrutinize, without touching, the pink palm of the tall fresh-faced blonde. His brown eyes were now set, and he breathed absinthe, but his speech remained unaffected.

"Mademoiselle is as yet unawake. Men mean so little to her, that she can be friends with men!"

"Why not!" retorted Melody Wynne. She was smiling all over her face as she leant forward, crossing those legs under the table, listening, amused, but refusing to take seriously any of this.

"Ah, Mademoiselle. *Méfiez-vous*. Beware. You speak in ignorance. You, who are of two nationalities. Yes? I am right? To you men could be dangerous. In you there is a slow fuse to which a man could put a light."

"Put a whater?"

"Talking about lights, Hanne, have you got a match?"

"Dangerous? Do you hear that? Anne, tell your boy friend not to sit so near me, will you? I daren't be friends with Teddy; he's dangerous!"

Teddy's smooth, typically Young-Oxford face assumed what he imagined was the dangerous look. Gaily the others laughed and ragged him; the patronne and two of the waitresses clustered closer to glance over his shoulder. A cabaret singer who had come in with his tiny harmonium sat down, drew a wheezy chord—was told, "Go away! We don't want you!" ("They don't want you, they are in full *rigolade*.") The singer melted away. It was in a group about the table of the English theatricals that the restaurant found its centre of attraction. All heads turned that way.

The fakir, oblivious, wrapped in a trance of absinthe and clairvoyance, murmured: "It's not this Monsieur who is to bring danger into the life of Mademoiselle. I see, not too far away, along the path she travels, another man; young, dark."

"That nancy-faced Horville?"

"'Ush!"

"A man," read the fakir, "with a peculiar Gift; gifted, also, with talent, great dramatic talent."

"And you dare to pretend it isn't me?"

"Shut *up*, Teddy!"

"Continue, Monsieur le fakir."

"It is said. That is all. I see, from this man, danger. And I have warned Mademoiselle."

VI

It was Anne le Mesurier who took the warning seriously, and who at midnight, sitting on a bedroom chair with her hard-working feet immersed in hot water and Reudel salts, repeated it to Melody.

"I say, my dear, do be careful."

"What about? Dark young men? Personally, I hate them. They never look bathed to me. I read in last Sunday's paper that your tastes in human beings are the same as your tastes in drink, and I always take white wine, light lager, and China tea, so that'll save me."

"Melody! When that freak was fortune-telling, I—I somehow wished I hadn't put you on to this job. I felt there was something in what he said. You may wish you'd never met Orville K. Kent—"

"Anne, darling, even from you I never heard such tripe!" declared Melody, making one of those pretty feminine gestures which are now almost lost to the world. (Curve of perfect arm that sweeps comb through mermaid tresses.) "That Lounge-lizard? That Turn? That Number? One can't look upon him even as *real*! There's a lot of peril in that, isn't there?"

"Well, there's the peril of whose dancing-partner he is," said Anne darkly. "And that was a bad *gaffe* you made at rehearsal. Everyone knows that if there's one thing Arabesque must have, it's for the rest of us to stick there behind her like so many flies on our piece of flypaper. Woe betide any poor fly who tries to buzz off it, and put herself forward. You keep those legs of yours well in the background, Melody, my deah, or Ara-

besque will be noticing that they're at least as good as her own that are insured for millions of francs. And then I tell you what'll happen—you'll be getting the push."

"Can't. Haven't I got my contract for six months?"

Anne smiled a disillusioned young smile over the steam of her footbath. "Your contract? She would worry and lose her shape. Isn't there a clause in all our contracts about the management having the option of cancelling them '*in the event of personal misbehaviour liable to cause scandal in or out of the theatre*'? Covers anything, that! You don't want to lose the first good job you've had in months, and your pals don't want to lose you, so you be dashed careful!"

CHAPTER V

DRESSING-ROOM RIOT

About love letters; about a hat trick; about one way of getting birthday presents; and about refusing to do as the Romans do

I

A FORTNIGHT later the revue was in full swing, with seven evening performances and two matinées a week, played always to crowded houses.

In poured the cosmopolitan public, to be bored, as a start, by a red-nosed farce trimmed with pre-war jokes, specially excavated by Arabesque. . . . Ah, yes! She, who missed no detail of organization, saw to it that some

quite stupid, unattractive number should always precede her own turn. Well she knew the value of contrast and of relief from that bored feeling as soon as one of her "own" tunes was played! Well she knew how the house would then crane, and breathe in, and whisper, "*She's coming on now!*"

So, every day and Sunday there was a wonderful reception for the Great Arabesque. Behind her, in that faultlessly-drilled geometrical symmetrical pattern, her Girls clicked scarlet Spanish heels . . . or ballooned Empress Eugénie crinolines, or swung Hawaiian fringes over Anglo-Saxon limbs . . . and among them, one of the flies on the fly-paper, danced Melody Wynne!

Was she happy in this life?

For answer to this question imagine those uplifted eyebrows, that owlish measuring, round-the-corner glance of Mr. George Robey's as he says "*Yes—and No!*"

II

Yes, she was happy, because, as Keith Cartwright told himself, she was Life's incorrigible joy-rider, and she could taste any flavour there might be in this existence of novelty and humour. They slipped by, full hard-working hectic days, and Melody danced, Melody whom toil did not quell, whom difficulties stimulated, Melody head of a tiny democratic Clique, Melody who had actually caught the notice of the directrix, Melody who still saw nothing of Paris, city of faëry shops and of green avenues on which the white candles of chestnut bloom were now extinguished. . . . Melody of the Music Hall Arabesque!

That theatre became part of her own private entertainment. Amused, she noted the actions and reactions of the French stars.

She sympathized with the homely love-story of Australian Mamie and that sweet fellow, her French dentist. She listened to Ginger's confidences about how far she was from ever getting the wish of her heart, that chinchiller coat. ("Oh, Mel, I b'leeve I could go potty on anyone who'd make a reel fuss of me and doll me up like a movie-star!") She followed the romance of Anne and Teddy Marvell, who shortly reached the quarrelling stage, so that during the matinée Anne's winning kick became a manifestation of purest *joie de vivre*—"Oh, Melody, it's so marvellous to fall devastatingly in love with the right person, who worships you, works in the same show and everything!")—while after the evening show a tight-lipped figure of Tragedy would stalk into her bedroom, slam the door, and announce, "It's all over. Teddy and I have done with each other for evah!"

She laughed. . . . Then she found herself actually envying. . . .

"The Girls for their romances?" she exclaimed to herself. "Pull up your socks, Melody. Why begin to feel the need of the dashed thing at this time of day, egad?" (An oath affected by her brother Bill.) "Am I catching it from that fool, Hanne? As for her warning—nothing doing. Her dangerous Orville doesn't even know I'm in the theatre!"

(She was wrong. Arabesque's film-Apollo of a dancing-partner, used to currents and cross-currents in the stream of music-hall life, was conscious of the new freshet of

growing attraction that might have carried him steadily in an unexpected direction, towards a girl who had for the first time in years stirred memories in a wary breast under an effectively-cut suit, but who would have been no manner of good to him. Orville K. Kent forced himself to remain *on the make*, like any jet-eyed little Catharinette, whose aim it is to be set up by some rich patron in her own hat-shop. Girls were barred! Arabesque, spotting the first sign of his attraction towards that peach of an English blonde, had stopped it like the wise business woman she was, at the right moment for stopping anything—before it has gotten going.)

“Which is all to the good,” Melody continued her musings, “and there’s nothing else in the romance line that I need look for—except—”

Ah, except Keith Cartwright’s letters from India. She imagined that in the circumstances there would be love-letters? . . . Perhaps you will be surprised at what I now tell you: Melody had never received a love-letter, unless you count what she called “try-it-on” notes sent round to her after performances on tour. These—or the single example of which Melody, from curiosity, had taken the smallest notice—had come from men as old, as typically “business” and as utterly uninteresting as Mr. Johnson-Brown himself, without even the Johnson-Brown importance to Girls. The men had asked Melody to supper in bleak railway hotels, and she had gone—once, taking Anne. You could not call those notes love-letters. Plenty of the Girls did get them. Once during the Glasgow Pantomime engagement Melody had picked up from the dressing-room floor what she had mistaken for a bill;

"C.O.D." . . . it read, and went off into other initials; "Ks"! "L.H.O.Ls," "Y.L.R." What in the world—"Here!" one of the various Dorothys in that dressing-room had sharply protested, "when you've done with my boy's letter, Melody Wynne—!"

"Oh, *sorry!* . . . I couldn't know—"

She had never had one of these until—

At last. Stuck into the criss-crossed board at the back of the cashier's desk in that little rue Chassée d'Antin Hotel, she found that to which she had been looking forward more eagerly than she knew. A thin grey envelope with an Indian stamp, and addressed to "Miss Melody Wynne."

At the sight of it Melody actually thrilled, feeling as though she had again met that passionate good-bye gaze from Keith's eyes.

At the touch of it in her hand she had thought, "Wonderful. It did make a difference his saying that . . . looking that . . . Will he write it?" She had paused before she opened the letter. She was not one of these people who nurse an envelope for quite three minutes, wondering, "How will it begin?"

Uncharacteristically, Melody did so now.

Then, tearing it open she had read: "Dear Melody—"

At the sight of that uninspiring address the thrill had gone flat, like milk that is bubbling up goes down when you take it off the gas-ring.

A prosaic image? Yes. But, you see, quite suddenly Melody felt caught back again to the Prosaic. Keith's letter was as prosaic as a string-bag with potatoes in it. She read—nothing, nothing, nothing about that send-off,

that *dis*-engagement party, which had been a gesture so original and comforting and *right* on Keith's part that it had begun to let Melody see him from a different angle. But this letter put him back as Only-Keith. She read . . . About Keith's itinerary for the next two weeks. About how far his first camp was from the town whence the runners would despatch this letter. About coolies' wages, if you please! About degrees of temperature in the shade! How was it men always thought in these terms of degrees, numbers, pints, feet, yards, miles, fractions-of-a-second? Or was it that these were the only part of their thoughts that men condescended to express?

Englishmen, anyway. . . .

During an entr'acte one of the French girls, all sidling and sparkling, had read aloud a love-letter from "an Art-Photographer," which had begun, "*Little soft white Idol of my Arms!* and had ended "*with a hundred thousand warm kisses on my little one's delicious nape-of-neck!*" Young Ginger, one of a group listening to this effort, had screamed—but literally screamed and whooped with derision, upon which the French photographer's idol had shown signs of "going for" Ginger, and peace had to be made in two languages by Melody Wynne.

"Gar, but I *had* to laugh," Ginger had protested. "*Yew* wouldn't want your fellow to write to you all sloppy like that! Betcher!"

"Perhaps not. No, but then I'm English," Melody had laughed. And, at the same time, that part of Melody which was French had unexpectedly raised its head, whispering, in the voice of the French grandmother, with whom she had spent the years before Steppy—"Mélodie,

thou knowest well it is a disappointment that this Keith of thine cannot write a love-letter. A love-letter should be the Caress on paper; a love-letter should at least know how to coax into the veine for Love! The finest men, however, write the poorest letters. Exasperating, that. They will not learn."

So in this letter from a potentially wonderful lover she was given to read cheery hopes that Melody was fit, hoping a topping time in the new show, and that with love to her and all the girls, he remained hers as ever, KEITH.

This she read; what she did not read was the sensitive masculine pride between the lines, forbidding Keith, who had been turned down by this girl, to let himself go in self-expression. "You can't put those things on paper," thought Keith. (Ah, the mistake, the thoroughly English-but-not-unendearing *mistake!*) "I'll just write pleasantly, regularly, to keep in touch with her. No frills."

"No frills?" thought Melody blankly, when she got the letters. "Always no frills! Writing once a week as reliable as Treasury-day! but always—"

She meant, always writing letters that took away what the sight of the envelope had given; and still the girl who had thirsted for Romance was left unsatisfied. As for Passion, Mademoiselle was still unawakened, remaining, of course, as dormant to that as was the Princess in the magic tower. Not even fully aware that there was anything so vital missing, she threw herself into the companionable life of the stage, living in, and with, a bunch of her peers, and writing off home and to India picture-postcards with views of Montmartre, portraits of the

Japanese acrobats, and a scribbled, "Having a marvellous time."

That communal spirit that makes girls of every grade look back upon their time at College, at the Art School, or in the little back laundry, and think, "*Those were the days!*" encouraged Melody to say, "*This is the Life!*"

At other times she thought, "No. Not the fun it might be. What's the matter? Something seems to be lacking. This isn't the rag it was on tour, last year. It's not the jokes other jobs were. One misses something . . . *vivid.*"

She sighed, the ingenuous one, wondering what this could possibly be?

"Perhaps the harder work is telling on one? Not enough air or out-of-door exercise. And our beautiful Chief is, of course, the limit. . . . The other girls don't feel like this. They seem to get as good a time as ever? Well."

Then Melody would shake her shining head, shrug her shoulders, and fling herself whole-heartedly into some typically dressing-room escapade.

For instance, that riot over the hat!

III

Melody and the Bun were difficult with hats, but this brimmy straw (bound with heaven-blue satin streamers, letting a trail of rosebuds cascade down even unto the hem of her garment, of white muslin which rose and fell in scallops above her rhythmic calves)—this picture-hat—(of which the perfect curve framed her face, swung across her profile, dissimulated the bun, and made Melody

into the Romney portrait of one of her own great-great-aunt's) was the success of her wardrobe. "Oh, darling, your *divine* hat!"

"It is rather heavenly. I shall jolly well buy it afterwards if I can, like you did your frock, Hanne."

For Anne le Mesurier possessed a green georgette Jenny "model," threadbare in places, rimmed at neck and arm-holes with liquid white, and dripping a trail of sea-green beads where'er she walked, and which she had secured for her own wardrobe at the end of a tour with the Number Three Company of "Why Worry?" There was no other garment in which she felt "so Anne," and though long ago it ought to have fetched eighteen pence from Anne's little dealer-woman in Pimlico, there it still drooped on its hanger among Anne's belongings, there it would be found while a single bead clung to its georgette—Anne's lucky frock. "This is going to be my lucky hat!" Melody wore it for a garden party number, with the secondary star, Mademoiselle Pléa, in which as chorus there had been told off four of Les Boys, four of the tallest Johnson-Brown Girls.

Mademoiselle Pléa complained to the wardrobe mistress.

"The hat of that tall English girl resembles my own. Remove it."

Madame Caldý removed the Romney, replacing it with something resembling a pimple.

For one performance only the Pimple appeared perched on the Bun, giving to Melody a bizarre eighteen-sixty look, and drawing a hearty unintended laugh from the house.

Later, Mademoiselle Pléa stormed, commanded Melody to eliminate her ridiculous coiffure, and to find a hat larger, larger, larger.

"Anything to please!" sang Melody, in a mood of schoolgirl mischief, and she unearthed a Victorian lampshade. Having been told to eliminate the bun, she took it down, braided it into an old-fashioned boarding school bellrope, and appeared on the stage looking all plait and hat, with nothing of her face showing but a mischievous grin, as of her brother Bill.

After the number—"The hat!" shrilled Madame Caldý, bustling into the dressing-room where eighteen girls were repairing make-up. "Again the hat. Forever the hat. Once more the hat is not right. Once more laughter drowns the lines of Pléa because of hats of you English girls. *Well*, says Arabesque, that one of you causes more worry than ten French! And to say that you earn more! Me, if I were in management, I would not engage a single! The hat, Mees, if you please to be enough amiable?"

Ironically polite intonation, marred by brusque gesture with which Madame Caldý, craning across the forms of Ginger and Anne le Mesurier, practically dragged from the head of Melody, who was somewhat behind-hand with her toilet, the Victorian lampshade.

Now Anne had happened towards the end of the number to have involved herself in a squabble with Teddy; Anne, ready to go off the deep end at a touch, was heard to protest languidly, "Oh, please, must you push like that?" But it will never be known whether or not Anne gave a tiny return push to Madame Caldý, whose figure

dwindled from spheroid bust to the smallest pair of feet in Montmartre, for she had once starred in a pantomime as *Cendrillon*, many Christmases ago.

In those days the Cinderella feet had less to support. To-day they tottered under the kilos of old Caldy who, losing her balance, jostled against Anne's neighbour.

Up flared the proverbial temper of the red-haired. Out flew Ginger's pointed elbow, an outraged Whitechapel treble demanded, "'Ere, oo you shovin', I should like to know? "*Regarday oo vous allay s'il vous plait*, and take that!"

Plonk! Down with a mighty smack on the floor plumped Madame Caldy, the wardrobe mistress. Up in the heated scented air to the dressing-room roof rose her cries.

Immediately the dressing-room lost its collective head. The voices of all but five of the eighteen were raised in a turkey-yard-like gabble; incidentally two of the girls started a totally irrelevant dressing-room scrap between themselves. ("I never did! Why, you little cat! You did! . . . I didn't!" *Slap!*) And above all the screams of the prostrate wardrobe mistress rent the air. "Madame Querlin! *Au secours!* 'Elp!"

Helped to her feet, Madame Caldy stumped out, leaving a wake of threatening screams along the corridor, leaving a gabble of consternation in the dressing-room. Had the old girl gone to fetch Arabesque? No! Arabesque was on. Old Caldy would probably fetch Gaston, the chief electrician; he and she had been pals for years. . . .

Swiftly the door burst open again.

"What is all this?" demanded a wheezy bass. "My wife! My dear wife has been beaten, assaulted, assassinated!" Panting, puffing through a walrus moustache, plum-red with rage, there stood, not the smart chief electrician, but Monsieur Caldy, the stage-manager, the husband whom Madame Caldy, though working under the same management, had left, but with whom she had just exchanged the first words in five years.

"Ladies, who has insulted my wife?"

Apparently nobody. All eighteen of the Johnson-Brown Girls were engaged upon the perfection of their make-up. Eyes stared into mirrors, the rest of the face masked by puff or hand-glass. None had any occupation except how to add a cubit to the length of their eyelashes. As for Melody Wynne, the entire upper part of her body was covered by the hair which she had unplaited, and behind which she took cover like some nymph in a golden-brown autumn grove. Neither of the dressers (in each of whose palms clanked four two-franc pieces) had heard or seen anything.

"All were in it. Particularly that Mees of hat!"

Melody, in a boding flash, saw herself packing up—trunk, suit-case, round hat-box, mother's dressing-case, passport. . . .

"Yes, *her* I will have chased from the Theatre!"

Then, diversion; the call for the Hawaiian number—

"Les Girls anglaises!"

Stampede of the girls towards the stage stairs. In the other direction, Madame Caldy, still sobbing, was led away by the Stage Manager.

"All shall be as you wish! And for you, my angel, to restore the courage, a *petit verre!*"

Mollified sobs of "My cabbage! . . . My wolf! . . . Ah, Théo-dorr-r—!"

IV

Down on the stage the Hawaiian number went with its usual swing, the house revelled with its usual abandon in the artificial romance. Arabesque, in sophisticated-savage poses, a headdress made of an entire young palm tree, and her incandescent beads, postured and preened. Behind her, in a pattern, forty fringed kilts swung above eighty shapely limbs, while the tall dancer second from the left swung high, swung low, joined her true young voice to the chorus, and thought, "I'm for it! '*Personal misbehaviour liable to cause scandal in the theatre.*' I'm fired."

V

But not this time. One riot had led to another, the original quarrel being the merest depth-charge. The hat scrap was forgotten in the subsequent epic fight between the chief electrician and Monsieur Caldý, the stage-manager, who had taken offence at something said by Monsieur Caldý *apropos* of the scandal of his (Monsieur Caldý's) being seen again with Madame Caldý, his wife.

This saved Melody, she was merely taken out of the Garden Party number to be supplanted by the girl Olive, for the reason that Melody and the bun could not get a hat to fit them.

"What else happened I don't know and I don't want to!" was Miss Earwaker's summing up. "But if there

are any more difficulties with you girls in this dressing-room, I'd just like to warn you that I shall know who's at the bottom of it."

VI

For the present, therefore, Melody remained the fly on the flypaper; weeks went by, life went rhythmically on, Keith's letters arrived regularly. Example:—

"DEAR MELODY,—Thanks for postcard. Just after dinner last night quite a deputation came along, consisting of my complete staff of Indian overseers and a small crowd from the village who had brought in a panther to show me. It had come into the village the night before and taken off a calf, so two of the villagers sat up in a tree to wait for it last night. I heard two shots about sundown and wondered what it was. Not bad work for the ancient muzzle-loaders these fellows use. There are lots of panther and bear about here, and sometimes a tiger comes along. I might bring back some furs. No more news. Turning in now after a pretty hard day's work. Love to you all.—Yours as ever, K. C."

And then a function began to loom in the minds of the entire Music Hall Arabesque *personnel*.

It was announced that a supper party would be given to all, on the huge cleared stage after the show, on the occasion of Arabesque's birthday.

"Gettin' a big girl now," commented Ginger, "'ope somebody'll be kind-'earted enough to call me a girl, time I'm 'alf 'er age!"

As preliminary to the party, subscriptions were got up for the Patronne's presents; and the organizers of this levy were the heads of each department. Their captain, Miss Earwaker, for the Johnson-Brown Girls; Teddy Marvell for Les Boys; Mademoiselle Phryne, for the Godiva Girls; Monsieur Caldý, the stage manager, for the carpenters and the stage hands; Monsieur Gaston, for the electricians, and Madame Caldý, for the dressers and needlewomen.

There were two dressers to a dressing-room; two black-clad, uninspired-looking, busy little bees of women to buzz round those colourful corolla costumes. Two pairs of needle-pricked, work-worn hands to minister to the young beauties of Les Girls, two pairs of tired feet that turned in or turned out grotesquely, stumping in all haste to answer the impatient calls of "*Habilleuse!*"

Up stumped Madame Querlin to fasten the back of the taut, rose-pink bodice that V-d, oh, most seductively! above Melody's proud crinoline skirt. (In this number the Girls made a whirlpool of roses, each rose a separate swirl above forty pairs of lace-edged *pantalettes*, while Arabesque and Orville K. gave their "Crinoline Kisses" dance.)

The dresser seemed particularly upset about something to-night.

"And to say, my God, that she will perhaps hardly look at this thing when she gets it!" muttered Madame Querlin, breathing hard into the dimples of Melody's alluring back. "If she says, 'Thank you, thank you,' very amiably at the supper, it will be all."

Melody with arms held out and eyes absently fixed upon her own ivory-and-rose reflection, asked, "What are you talking about?"

Cautiously the dresser looked round, saw that the other dresser was at the end of the row, saw that the two girls within earshot were *sympathiques*, and muttered, "I am talking about the present, Mees, for the Patronne's fête. The present of us habilleuses and sewing-women is to be a bronze Love, a mascot for madame's automobile. And to say that I, I have to pay five francs out of my wages, which as you know are but eight francs a night. It's hard. It's hard."

"Why pay?" asked Melody. Above the reflection of her own ivory shoulders, masked by liquid white, she perceived the reflection of the angular, black-clad bones of Madame Querlin lifted in a shrug; ineffable, typically Latin feminine, and resigned.

"If one did not pay one would go out. There are plenty of others to take one's place in this theatre. Me, I have still to help my old mother, and my brother who was mutilated in the war, to say nothing of my own little boy. One pays."

"Will all the dressers and needlewomen pay?"

"Naturally. All."

"Will everybody in this theatre pay for a present for Arabesque?"

"But everybody, Mees. And the electricians, and the stage-hands, and the limelight fellows, and the orchestra, all, all, all!"

With the last "all" her hands flew out from the bodice, thus releasing Melody, who whirled round like an enor-

mous pink teetotum to exclaim, with real disgusted generous indignation, "Not all! Me, I give nothing."

"Ah, you can laugh, you," retorted the dresser, laughing herself without gaiety as her hardened fingers flew to fasten another of the pink bodice buds. Melody, however, meant what she said.

VII

And when at the end of the show that rigidly-marcelled disciplinarian, her Captain, Miss Earwaker, came round with the hat, she was met by Melody's stare and a "Subscription for Arabesque's present? Not from me."

A buzz of protestation from Miss Earwaker. Melody couldn't refuse . . . the understood thing. . . . Goodness her, all this fuss about ten francs? And everybody in the theatre contributing as a matter of course. Even the stage-hands!

"Yes," said Melody Wynne blandly, "I'm afraid most of them have old mothers to keep, or brothers mutilated in the war."

"You can't say things like that, girl, *here*. When you're under Arabesque's management you have to do as the Romans do!"

Naughty Melody suggested this proverb would go better, "Do as the Arabs do?"

"Have some *sense*, Melody. . . . You can't be the only member of the Johnson-Brown Girls who won't pay up with everybody—"

"Ha, I'm with you there. I don't intend to be the only one," said Melody with a sudden sparkle. "I don't think you'll get a sou out of any of my friends."

Out sideways went one of Melody's lyric legs under the dressing-room table. It got her friend Mamie on the shin. But the Clique had heard. No need for anything more to Mamie, Sybil, Ginger, or Anne le Mesurier.

"Please count me out of this," drawled Anne, when Miss Earwaker approached her.

"Me, too," rapped out Ginger. "'Ard-working girl like me can't afford no luxuries."

Miss Earwaker longed to slap her, and to remind her that she could not afford *not* to subscribe. But also Miss Earwaker could not afford to have a hole made in her chorus by five—well, leaving out that unprintable Australian—four of its best dancers. If the Patronne got to hear that five Johnson-Brown Girls had refused *en masse* to contribute towards her present, some of her annoyance would be visited on the corrugated head of their Captain.

In the voice of the reluctant loser, Miss Earwaker protested, "Listen, you girls, it's the *rule!*"

"Five of us, dear," explained Mamie, "are going to be the exception."

The Captain knew that cat Melody had got the better of it yet once again. But Melody was going to be made sorry for it. This kind of thing couldn't go on for ever, in any theatre . . .

VIII

As the Clique straggled hotel-wards, Mamie complained there was just one snag about all this independence.

"Which?" asked Melody, turning. She had been walk-

ing ahead, Ginger clinging to her arm. "Which snag?"

Mamie's billowy bosom heaved to a sigh of, "Missing Arabesque's birthday party!"

"You'd forgotten that, Mel. Ruddy shime!"

"Yes, we can't very well go to Arabesque's birthday binge if we don't give towards her present, can we? *Noblesse oblige*, Melody! Anyhow the Earwaker will see we don't."

"She'll see we do, Hanne," declared Melody rightly. "The entire Forty of us get in all right, or I'll eat my bun. Everybody's invited. Are they told they've got to pay ten francs entrance? We're justified. Absolutely!" declared Melody—all the more obstinately because of whispering scruples in her inmost heart. She didn't want to go to this party, but go she would. Hadn't she said so to her friends?

"Melody's off again. Then we shall have to back her up," was the Clique's summing up. "Arabesque *has* plenty, as it is, in against her English dancers. May as well get what we can out of the birthday. . . ."

This was not to be the end of it, and some days before that birthday Arabesque was to get something more out of them.

CHAPTER VI

THE FREE TURN

*About a charity that began when
girls ought to have been at home*

I

THE brilliant comet Arabesque, to whom all these girls provided a shining tail, and who was then at her zenith, tying with perhaps two other stars for the honour of being the biggest draw in Paris, was approached by magnates of a certain committee, who, between the afternoon and evening shows, called upon her at the music hall.

One of these magnates was a distinguished old gentleman, red-rosetted, who made military hospitals his aim in life. The other was a Monsieur Bertin, himself a Parisian music hall director; of imposing, not to say mountainous, figure, with piercing black eyes, and he was known to be a very old friend (rumour said an old flame) of the *grande Arabesque*.

They found her lying among every-coloured Vorticist cushions of her dressing-room divan; about her short figure a marabout wrap created by Louise Boulanger, beside her a table with champagne, a plate of caviare sandwiches. Also a chair supporting the lounging slim form, clad in a sombrely rich satin bathrobe, of her American dancing partner.

The young man rose, in duty bound, as there were shown in to this heavily-perfumed lair, these two other visitors. After they had kissed her small curvey shiny-tipped hand, Arabesque waved it towards Orville K. Kent's vacated seat.

With a bow Red Rosette took the chair; while Arabesque girlishly patted a corner of her divan, into which Bertin sank like a grocer's weight dropped into a pan of dough.

"Well, *ma chère amie*? Younger and lovelier than ever," began Bertin, with a complimentary smile in parenthesis. "You" (he used the "*thou*" of camaraderie), "you are perhaps aware of what we—"

Arabesque interposed.

"One moment." She turned in the cushions. Then she said to Orville K.: "Darrleeng! These gentlemen and I have to confer—"

"Please, please!" put in the Red Rosette, courteously. "It is not necessary to derange Monsieur."

Arabesque took no notice. "—to confer on a matter of business. *Les affaires, tu sais!*"

She who conducted practically all her own business, never discussed any of it with her dancing partner, which irritated him. She considered it better policy sometimes to irritate him, and to keep him always perhaps a little jealous, her wary eye turned up to his absurdly regular-featured face. Aha, it registered annoyance, she noticed. So did the visitors.

Red Rosette put up a deprecating hand. This was scarcely "business!" An appeal to the so well-known good heart of Madame—

"—so, darrleeng," Arabesque went on, with a casual little wave towards the dressing-room door, "I send for you when I have finished; now you run away while I talk, yes?"

"Sure," said Orville, achieving his screen bow, but feel-

ing as small as he was intended to feel, before the two other men. (Bertin thought: "Her old manner. She is then not yet afraid that this youngster will some day go, never to return?")

The tall young man, whom Melody had called "that Close-up," might fume as he liked, promising himself that some day he'd say just what he thought. Some day he'd be the star, the attraction, the draw . . . But for the present all he dared say was "So long!" All he dared do was to snatch up his half-finished glass of champagne (excellent vintage, supplied, of course, gratuitously by a firm who wished to keep Arabesque's good word), and to drain it before he made his exit.

"Charming fellow," observed Bertin conversationally, as the door closed. Then the red-rosetted old gentleman brought out the appeal they had come to make. Would Madame, whose warm-hearted generosity was so well-known, contribute—

At this word: "What?" shrieked the star. "Ah but! My poor friends, you come to me, me with my enormous expenses that I must pour out for this new show. Me, poor-little-woman-without-the-sou, I am asked for money?"

As she flung out her hands Bertin's black eyes snapped with private amusement; he remembered these gestures from days when the *petite Arabesque* was well-salaried at fifty pre-War francs a week.

"Money? Ah no," the hospital magnate reassured her. It was her talents that she was asked to contribute. At the forthcoming opera ball organized for the benefit of soldiers mutilated in the War, a bright list of celebrities

was to appear; the Folly Sisters, Maurice Quichotte, even Mistinguett was to be asked. Might he not add to this programme the brilliant name of Arabesque?

The star's expression changed. Graciously she promised to give a dance, a song, to bring with her in addition her spectacular chorus of French figurantes, and of forty English girls.

All was arranged.

But it was not until the last minute of the show, not until the final *ensemble* on the evening of the ball, that the message came round to the chorus.

II

"All the English girls will be required to support the Patronne at the Charity Ball!" They were not to take off their make-up, they were to retain their costumes for the last number (Hawaiian Moonlight).

"What time are we starting?" asked Melody.

"Wait and see," said Miss Earwaker.

It was midnight when they began to wait.

Time went slowly on.

Still they waited, with long-suffering British optimism. Ginger, in a macintosh over fringes and beads, sang like a Tommy in a trench to keep up the spirits of the others—

"We went to the funeral just for the ride,
Just for the ri-hi-hi-hide!"

"All *I* hope is, this ride won't mean funerals for the lot!" ejaculated Mamie when at long last there lurched up to the stage-door the omnibuses which were to take them to the opera. "I'm not one to get the wind up in

cars, particularly, but will you look at these drivers!"

Shrill screeches of greeting from the French girls at the entrance were acknowledged by jovial bellows from those men.

"They're tight!" gasped Mamie indignantly.

Melody tried to soothe her; begged her to allow for the exchange. Frenchmen always did sound so much more excited than our people. Even in their soberest moments, they had the loud pedal well down—

"*En voiture, en voiture!*" bellowed a driver, almost as loudly as his horn. Amidst a gale of laughter from the French girls, all embarked and, during that lurching perilous descent of omnibuses down the steep rue Pigalle, it was the French girls who lifted their voices in song as zestful as it was off the note; and who incited their drivers to sway and to swerve, laughing abandonedly at the English girls' alarm.

Melody remembered hearing her engineer brother say, "The Latin temperament, allied to motor-mechanism, is enough to put the wind up the stoutest-hearted of us. In a French taxi one feels like the egg in an egg-and-spoon race. You've got to remember there's no speed limit, that these fellows have to provide their own petrol, and that they're working against time. If everybody didn't go as fast as everybody else in a Paris street it would mean crash after endless crash. Plenty of our own speed fiends are reckless enough. I'll admit it takes the hardier French motorist to remove his hands for the mere purpose of gesticulating in traffic. Still, in the long run I don't suppose their percentage of catastrophes is higher than elsewhere."

Melody told herself this as the bus seemed on one wheel to turn the corner of the rue Blanche. Grisly trip . . .

Anne through her clenched teeth said it was like a dance of death.

"Go on, always look at the bright side, Hanne," urged Ginger. "Yorter be thankful it isn't the dead of winter and us getting our death of cold. Same thing to Arerbesk if we was."

Sybil, whose finger-nails were halfway through her palms, hissed that it was worse than an audition.

III

"Thank God," breathed Mamie in pious relief, "here's the Opera. Here we are at last."

Yes, here was the Opera house, the steps, the cordon of police, the crowds waiting outside, the officials to marshal the various artistes; here, however, was not the end of the trials for the chorus.

They had to wait; their principals must be met, saluted, escorted to supper.

Melody caught sight of the glossiest top hat in Paris, surmounting an effectively-cut light evening coat over a glimpse of Hemjic dress suit; a super lizard wriggling a way through the throng.

"Monsieur? . . . Ah, yes, Monsieur Kent!" (Arabesque's partner was not dancing. Only, as Anne put it, dancing attendance.) "*Par ici, Monsieur, s'il vous plait.* Madame Arabesque's table is here . . . Champagne to Monsieur . . ."

For the chorus, the Johnson-Brown Girls and the rest of the background, a bare-legged supperless wait. . . .

IV

"The last morsel of anything I had to eat was that eggy mess at seven o'clock, because the steak was so red I couldn't touch it," Sybil said. "One-thirty is it?"

Getting on for two.

Hungrier and hungrier, weary, goose-fleshed, Forty Johnson-Brown Girls waited, waited in the positions, until—

"Ah!"

On the great cleared stage a rain of rose-petals showered down in the half gloaming. (Are there such roses in Hawaii?) The orchestra struck up Arabesque's song-hit.

"Hawaii-an moonlight,
Hawaii-an Moon!"

On trooped those Girls, to form that spectacular perfectly-drilled geometrical background. Slowly, slowly rose the lights, even as there rose the excitement of the packed Charity Ball audience. Up, up, the stage moonlight. The limes swept their ray, and, in the middle of it, like a moth caught in radiance, on danced—

"*Arabesque!*"

Ah! Here she was, coming to dance and sing for Charity's sake. People pressed forward to look, what did they see? A flash of green waving palm-tree headdress and symmetrical legs. A genial smile full of dazzling teeth, behind it a short nose and bright eyes (an excellent "stage-face"). They caught the wave of a little, shiny-tipped hand, the note of a French singing-voice lifted in

a verse about the '*clair de la lune*,' taken up by forty, fifty, sixty young voices behind her. Another wave of the hand. The feathery palm-tree headdress swayed to the boards in acknowledgment of her excellent reception. Then, off! Almost before all of the people at the Ball knew that she had come on. Off, in her ermine wrap, to her car—it was to-night the white-bodied Rolls driven by the darkie chauffeur. Off! to have her laprobe tucked about her feet, her cushions put behind her head by the attentive hands of her dancing partner; off swept the Patronne.

The Girls, yawning till they cracked their make-up, shivering in their bare legs, waited, waited for the return of those omnibuses with those drivers. Who perhaps were not tipsy? Who perhaps were only full up with coffee and *joie de vivre*, but who, during the interval, had certainly not become any more sober in manner or more reassuring to their English passengers.

Taking their corners even more recklessly, those omnibuses pounded back up the hill, past the Blue Barn, up to the Music Hall Arabesque, and actually without catastrophe or mishap they disembarked their exhausted cargo. By this time even the French girls were subdued.

One more trial. The Arabesque's door-keeper, who resembled a black pug, and who was a proverbially heavy sleeper, had now to be aroused.

"Open the door!" (Knock, knock, knock.) "Open! *S'il vous plait.*"

Another wait.

"*Ouvray la porte, voulez voo?*" from little Ginger, who

added other less Berlitz phrases to the imprecations with which her French mates made ring the welkin of Montmartre.

Drowsy grumblings from within. The door was at last opened. Again the troupe was let in to the eerily-deserted-looking theatre premises.

Then came the change again, the taking off of the fringes and headdresses, the removal of the officially heavy make-up, the huddling back into ordinary dress, the scurryings like rabbits to their various cheap hotels and rooms, the fumbling for keys, the ascent of many stairs (the lifts not functioning any more).

Poor chorus-girls, about whose name, let me again remind you, there still clings that aroma of gay impropriety, that undying legend of gilded leisure! (*"You may break, you may shatter the vase if you will, but the scent of the roses will cling round it still."*)

However, most of the Girls were in bed at about a quarter-past-three, and next day's rehearsal was not called until eleven.

V

Now that morning the tallest of the Johnson-Brown Girls had been too sleepy to bother to change into her neat practise dress. She had merely pulled her skirt through her belt, rolled her stockings down to her ankles, and in the interval was to be seen moving about the premises and scanning walls and notice-boards with an eager, seeking glance.

"What have you lost, Melody?"

"Nothing, thanks. I'm merely looking for something."

She moved on, not noticing what several of the others, resting, had now seen. The appearance in a doorway of Arabesque's dancing partner. Lord! Imagine Orville K. turning up at the theatre at this (for him) unearthly hour of the morning . . . As Sybil said, seeing that he was the Patronne's gilded slave and special messenger, perhaps she had sent him on some errand?

To which young Ginger replied with satire, "Yers. Sent 'im in 'ere to get an eyeful of Mel., I shouldn't wonder. Didn't that gipsy warn 'er? Didn't that French gentleman that told our 'ands say she'd got to beware dark men? That's 'im, chasin' 'er."

However he came to be there, there he was. Black japped head, six foot two of cinema favourite form, gloved in dove-grey flannels, silken shirt of palest mauve, parma violet tie by Sulka to match handkerchief and glimpse of sock above grey suède shoes by Mr. Yapp, attitude by Orville's first producer, he lolled against the wall. And in spite of get-up and attitude being so completely of the films, there was something definitely human and boyish about this man who let a glance, veiled by long lashes, follow each movement of the second tallest of Arabesque's troupe of Johnson-Brown Girls.

"Melody Wynne," asked her Captain sharply, "what are you looking for?"

"Oh! Only a notice from Arabesque. Only for a word of thanks from the management to the artistes who gave their services in that free turn last night? There doesn't seem to be anything at all?"

There was not.

Miss Earwaker flounced aside, with a mutter that one

of these days Melody would be laughing on the wrong side of her face!

Young Melody, still laughing in the usual manner, bounded back along the corridor to encounter this tailor's apparition of the American dancer, and met, from between those inordinate eyelashes, that quite human boyish twinkle.

Was he going to speak to her? Melody spoke first, and with a touch of sunny bravado. "Good morning, Mr. Kent." She very nearly brought out something about how he had enjoyed last night's ball. But that twinkle had disappeared, and, with quite a formal "Good morning," so had Mr. Orville K. Kent.

"Melody, darling," frowned Anne le Mesurier. "You *have* been warned."

"Yes, and now I have been snubbed. I didn't have much of a success, did I? I thought the man might be wanting to have a little heart-to-heart talk to me about something or other. He had opened his mouth. Perhaps he can only say 'Good morning,' like a doll?" suggested cheerful Melody. Neither she nor any of her associates guessed that actually the admired Mr. Orville K. Kent, Arabesque's partner, had been on the point of asking Melody if she were going to give him a dance at Arabesque's birthday party.

For this party was to be the next excitement in their lives.

CHAPTER VII

THE ORGY

*About a supper table where memory
was an uninvited guest; about a
speech that drew a cheer; and
about an unexpected invitation*

I

FIVE she-wolves of France could hardly have competed for sharp-set appetites with five English girls, who (after the evening performance, the removal of stage make-up and costume, the assumption of milder make-up and more subdued evening frocks) presented themselves in the supper-room which had so lately served as the Hawaiian beach on which they danced. For the stage was hardly recognizable, with the new arrangement of lights, red carpets, palms, looping flower garlands, dazzle of napery, silver, glass, thronging faces, most of them only too familiar, all of them out of their familiar positions.

At the top of the stage-slope, a long table was reserved for the music hall's magnates, managers, directors, producers, and honoured guests, grouped about the chief seat—that of the Patronne. Smiling and enthroned, there she sat, and at her right hand was Orville K., handsome as any film-sheik of his type.

Conscientiously attentive, and with one of his best producer-taught gestures, he drew Arabesque's Spanish shawl of milk-white silk and fringe from about Cheruit's latest evening model—of which the diaphanous, smartly-irregular, broken-lined, swooping, drooping, many-pointed perfection took (as she well knew!) another ten theatrical seasons away from the star's actual age.

"Our birthday choild!" commented Ginger. "Didn't I know it? All in pewer white. I noo it. On any garlar occasion, when do you see a fat woman like that turn 'erself out in anythink but virgin white?"

The smaller tables were set for parties of six. About them buzzed like bees the various girls French or English, secondary Stars, Boys, Electricians, Stage-hands. . . . One table was set for five, the sixth chair having been whisked aside by Melody Wynne (she who had also forbidden her Clique to eat during the whole of that day).

"We won't have anybody here with us. Keep to ourselves."

II

"Remember the last time, Girls, that our lot sat down together to a supper-party at home?" breathed Mamie reminiscently. "Melody's send-off."

"So it was!"

How curious that in Melody, then, there should stir that homesick pang. . . . With what faraway eyes she stared across the supper table from which she had snatched that sixth chair! Into that atmosphere of "rag" there stole a silent intruder. Memory. . . . The last night at home! Why was it that that send-off, all those weeks ago, had been as good fun as anything that had since come Melody's way? Jolly, to be with one's own people, with the feeling of "The Family" four-square at one's back, while one acted hostess to one's pals! Jolly, to breathe about one that accustomed mellow atmosphere. Jolly, the long windows open on to the English garden; and the look of the long table set with old silver, cut

glass, which Steppy's hands had polished bright as a shower of April rain—the table thronged with clean, frank, cheerily unexcitable English faces—

"However you can bear to be away from that lovely home, I don't know," sighed Mamie. "All those nice boys there were. . . . What was the name of that nice boy-friend of yours with the fair hair, that stood the supper, darling? Him that was going off to India?"

"My friend Keith Cartwright? There was another letter from him this morning, from some ungodly place beginning with 'Pavvati-something—' "

That letter still lay where Melody had tossed it down, on her half of the hotel dressing-table, for any one to read who could. Anyone would be welcome to every word in Keith's next masculine hand:

(. . . "a rush job at present, inspecting part of this new line which has been taken about 120 miles into the jungle. All bamboo at one place; the coolies scared stiff of being jumped on by tiger or bison. I got a bear last night in the moonlight. He was in the shadow of a tree eating berries . . ."

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. . . "the line will be about 300 miles long and will have several bridges, two of which are large ones.")

"I," Melody added, lightly, "had nearly forgotten all about old Keith—"

What? Forgotten? Here, as if to punish Melody for the half-involuntary fib, here that uninvited guest Memory

played one of its tricks. For an instant the garish brilliance of the supper-room, the heated atmosphere, the noise, the scents of powder and people and food, were blotted away from the senses of Melody. For that instant she was conscious only of the fragrant, breezy, purple May dusk which had rendered romantic a garden of the English suburbs. Lantern-light flickering on foliage was again in her eyes; cool scent of grass and lilac were in her nostrils, and, in her ears, the whisper of leaf to leaf, before a man's voice passionately protested: "I can't! I won't kiss you good-bye." Again a man's arms seemed to strain Melody to his pounding heart. A man's eyes took their last look down into hers, and, even while his voice protested "I can't," made her feel that he did kiss her; and how!

"After which, he goes and writes those '*Letters to my Great-Aunt*'," thought Melody, piqued . . . worse than piqued . . . deprived, defrauded more deeply than she guessed. . . . Consciously, she only thought, "I wonder what old Keith is up to at this moment?"

III

Had Melody known!

Keith at that moment was looking down into another woman's eyes, talking gaily enough to another woman. . . . No, do not be misled! That other woman was merely little Mrs. MacPherson, a kindly little Scotch body. (Curious, isn't it, how people always apply the term "*body*" to a woman in whom physique is not the predominant charm!) She was the wife of one of Keith's Scots engineering pals, who had confided his missus and

the two kids to Keith during the homeward voyage.

Together they were leaning on the rail, and Keith was saying to Mrs. MacPherson: "There goes the last of what they call the finest view in Asia. Bombay from the stern of a ship."

"Homeward bound," sighed the little body, gazing back delightedly over the wake. "Are you landing at Marseilles too, Mr. Cartwright? Then we'll have your company up through France and across to England together?"

"I'm afraid," said Keith Cartwright, "that we part company in Paris. I have to look up friends there."

The Scots engineer's wife thought, "Friends? A gurr!"

"And you've wired to your people that you're coming home sooner than they knew?"

"My mother knows. Not—not anybody else. I told everybody I'd be in India three or four months. It's under three."

The Scots engineer's wife thought: "He's not told *Hurr!*"

IV

"Voilà mes demoiselles!"

The Clique, ravenous, turned to the half condescending waiters, and to the supper.

All was of the best, from succulent *hors d'œuvres* to chocolates showered down upon all the tables as largesse from every French manufacturer who believes in the uses of advertisement. Champagne, white wines and red, like everything else appreciated by Arabesque, were of super excellence and free. ("You don't suppose that a star like her," commented Sybil, "is expected to pay *money* for things?") At the expense of first-rate firms, who

meant to share Arabesque's publicity, crowds of hungry little artistes feasted as never before; humbler workers tucked napkins into collars, squared elbows and ploughed uncompromisingly through the menu from piping-hot soup to coffee and liqueurs. At the top table the Powers feasted and drank deep.

As for Melody and Clique, I regret to find only one word to express what they did. They gorged.

Yes, their behaviour was all that Miss Earwaker later told them that it was, while the other thirty-five Johnson-Brown Girls agreed. Refusing ten francs subscription, then turning up at the party and guzzling. How unladylike, unrefined, common; oh-my-dears, *low!* Other expressions may occur to you? But while you think these things of the Clique who ate supper without paying for the present, think too that all of them (except Mamie) were under twenty-four, and that for the last seven weeks they had worked like driven slaves. Think of those Charity Balls; of those cold and foodless waits. ("Arer-besk jolly well owes us a snack!" protested Ginger, through a mouthful and a half of dressed crab.) Think of the fatigue of extra work, the hurried toilet at dawn, the cold, the three-o'clock-in-the-morning wretchedness, the hours of sleep cut short. Consider next day's unthanked rehearsal. Can you not forgive the schoolgirl escapade of Melody and Clique?

You can't? Pass on, then, and let your sense of justice be satisfied. For Nemesis had an eye on Melody, and would presently pounce, in the unforeseen manner of Nemesis, upon that blithely feasting girl.

Course succeeded course; laughter and babble, taking

an even more parrot-like note, rose to the very flies, out-screached at last by the appeal for silence.

"Speech!" shrieked Ginger in the pause, so that eyes turned upon that group of five ensconced behind palms at that table near the buffet. "*Speech!*"

First, however, came the presentation of the birthday gifts. Caskets of perfume. Costly imitation flowers, jewelled sacs, Lalique glass, this, that and the other offering, for the Patronne, "from her devoted *personnel*." A handbag made of a life-size sham Pekinese, be-ribboned, bulgy-eyed, almost as repulsive as the real animal, bearing a card inscribed "*With love from the Johnson-Brown Girls*," was put into the Patronne's arms, amidst applause. A small bronze Love, clad as are the Godiva Girls; its message was read aloud in Orville's foreign French: "A little mascot for Madame's car, with felicitations from her dressers, *œvreuses*, and needlewomen." Applause. Melody, full now of gay spirits, excellent supper and bravado, clapped heartily to see the Patronne bestow a girlish kiss over the head of the Pekinese, and smile as she set the mascot down on the table beside Orville Kent's champagne glass.

Incidentally that glass had been filled once oftener than was the habit of a man whose god was his waistline. Quite likely there were rebellious thoughts for him to drown?

Presently, with mountainous Mr. Bertin leaning towards her on one side, with slim Orville K. on her other side, achieving into her ear a whisper at which she was seen to smile complacently, the short woman rose to her exquisitely-shod feet.

Pray silence for Arabesque to make her speech; an excellent one.

It was all about *esprit de corps*, about the co-operative spirit, and about that unity which is strength. This revue, "*Ça, c'est Montmartre*," owed its marvellous success to united effort. From Monsieur the Managing Director—a dazzling smile at him—down to the youngest of the workmen—a dazzling smile into the air, there was not one member of her staff who had not worked for her with tireless loyalty and devotion.

(Here her manicured hand toyed with the bronze gift from her dressers; paid for with earnings that should have represented comforts, no, necessities for somebody's little boy, somebody's old mother, somebody's brother mutilated in the War). She, Arabesque, was convinced they would continue to make the same success, for they were all going to continue to work harder than ever!

Gracefully she subsided into the chair, with the priceless white Spanish shawl and Orville's black arm on the back of it. From all the tables rose the storm of applause, while, shrill above the clamour, the "*Vive Arabesque! Vive la Patronne!*" above the salvoes of clapping sounded the ironic young voice of Ginger of the Johnson-Brown Girls, raising a British cheer.

"'oorih!"

V

Then, after hasty removal of supper tables from the stage upon which most of the guests danced for their daily bread, then Melody Wynne became involved in that unforeseen fatal escapade of Orville K. Kent. . . .

It was weeks ago since Arabesque had "raised merry Hell" about her partner speaking to the girl. Since then, each time the revue's male star had noticed that girl, that peach of a honey-blonde called Melody, he had reminded himself—"None of that, son!" He was not going to queer his standing with the Lady-Boss by so much as seeing again any girl out of her chorus. As for dancing with them at the party, why, hadn't he nearly been mutt enough to ask this Melody, pulled himself up in time, and decided "*not for him!*" These resolutions have a way of crashing . . .

As the jazz band struck up "Hallelujah," Arabesque sailed away in the arms of Monsieur Bertin, that same fat Frenchman for whom he, Orville, had been hoofed out of her dressing-room while they talked business. Hoofed out, by Gosh, as if he were the Chinese pedicurist!

To-night just the same way off she went, with the little dismissing wave of the hand; half tender, half contemptuous, authoritative, it meant, "See you presently, darrleeng." Taking it for granted that he would still be waiting whenever she had finished whatever (or whoever) she was doing. "What a dog's life!" Lounging near the buffet, tapping cigarette against costly case, Orville watched the dancers. A merry group of Johnson-Brown Girls eddied past him; as luck would have it, one was this same Melody whom he had had reason to avoid.

She was chattering with a tiny carrotty-haired girl, who in another moment broke off with a skirl of laughter to dance with one of the Japanese dwarf acrobats.

Now most of the girls were dancing together, some with

Les Boys . . . now that fellow Teddy Marvell was making his way through the throng to Melody. . . .

Orville K. Kent tossed his cigarette on to a plate and cut in.

"Say, Miss Melody, isn't it? Won't you dance this with me?"

As their steps flowed together, in that coloured whirlpool of dancers, this pair seemed the illustration to some love story in *Nash's* or *Harper's Bazaar*. Effective, flamboyant. Hero, immaculately tailored *beau idéal* of cinema audiences, perfection of dark good-looking young men. Heroine, a blonde Radiance of laughing face, wispy frock, and perfect legs.

"Oh, good God, look at Melody. She's off," whispered Anne to Teddy in the circling crowd. "This has torn it, everybody'll notice them . . ." But those two were not noticing. It was with all the respectful ardour of a carefully-brought-up American country lad at a party, that Orville was murmuring to the Girl Anglaise in his arms that he guessed this was what he had been living for for quite a while. Hadn't he always known how lovely they'd dance together?

Light-heartedly, buoyant Melody told him that was frightfully nice of him? Gorgeous, wasn't it? All she meant was this delight of abandoning one's self in perfect rhythm to the fierily perfect jazz orchestra, with a perfect partner. Not that she, still practically unawake to Man, heeded whether she was following the steps of Teddy Marvell, chorus-boy (also a beautiful dancer) or of Mr. Orville K. Kent, Star. But for him, it must be confessed that his every fibre was aware of this particular partner's

young attractiveness. Through harsh flimsy georgette of her pink frock he sensed, warm against his palm, the soft and solid velvet of her dimpled back. Some peach. Some dancer. Some pep to her, he'd tell the world. Sense of humour, too. Maybe it wouldn't be dandy if this little girl were his permanent dancing-partner, and if they could go off on their own, exhibition dancing . . . Casinos . . . Villes d'eaux . . . Vichy . . . Mont d'Or . . . Oh, gee! Looking down as they turned, he caught the sweet untroubled Wynne stare. Characteristic of the family who gave so much liking and got so much love was this smile which had been fatal alike to a woman called Steppy, a girl called Doreen, and to a man called Keith Cartwright. . . . Melody was smiling for pure unmixed pleasure in the dance, but that loveliness of eyes, dimples, and lips, went to the head of her partner. Circumspect Star died out of him, became supplanted by that younger Orville who had lived the life of a Western cowboy, and had been responsive as any other youngster to the lure of a peach face, the call of Youth to Youth, the appeal of innocent frolic.

"Say, Miss Melody!" (he had a strong wish to say Honey or Baby) "they're encorin' this. These dannces aren't long enough for me. It's mighty hot in here."

He was about to suggest making tracks out, off, down Town somewheres, into one o' these swell night-resorts of Paris, to dannce there in comfort. Maybe not—

"But what's the matter with just goin' outside and joy-ridin' on those roundabouts?"

CHAPTER VIII

GIDDY-GO-ROUND

About fun of the fair; about a young man's favourite topic of conversation; and about the secret sorrows of a "lizard"

I

AT the top of the hill outside the Arabesque, and devouring a large slice of the Boulevard Clichy, there was down in the middle of this nineteen-twenty-odd Paris what seemed a corner of some old-world country fair.

Booths, sideshows of fat ladies and wild animals, swing boats, giddy-go-rounds. Circles of galloping horses, ostriches, pigs, or swan-shaped coaches were suspended by long may-poles to upper circles, and in the midst of each the steam organ blares and roars a blast of tunes which were old in New York before ever they reached London—"Say It with Music," "Yearning," "Wonderful One," and "You'd Be Surprised!" Carved figures of hippy ladies in tights, gilded and painted and faded, strike at mechanical intervals ("ting, ting") upon a triangle; sound at other intervals ("clish, clash") loud cymbals. All is shouting gaiety, primitive fun; and into this fun of the fair plunges nightly an infinitely mixed crew of revellers. Mr. Orville K. Kent, the already successful star, climbing up into a florid coach to take his seat beside this English chorus-girl, continued to feel as he had not felt since days when Hollywood had taken him from the Great Outdoors, and Paris had grabbed him from Hollywood.

Here was a snatched hour from dancing attendance on Daisy (alternative name for Orville's lady boss), and

with this stunning girl, some peach, some baby, as he was ready to telephone Mars! as round and past (*ting, ting!*) round and past they whirled, caught into the glamour of swift movement, dazzling lights, cheap heady music, all the fun of the fair. Melody, the joy-rider, loved this up-and-down, circular rush (*clish, clash!*) which made the Boulevard Clichy, its lights, its crowds into this jazz-patterned ribbon paid out in length after length before her eyes. What, *what* a pity none of the Girls had come out with them! As for this absurd film Sheik beside her, he seemed still as artificial as one of these scarlet-nostrilled prancing wooden horses, except that he had, fair play to him! danced divinely. . . . Round and past . . . out blared a fresh tune. . . . Melody hummed, "*So say it with a beautiful song,*" losing Orville's next words. (They were words that every girl may expect to hear some time from what is now called the male environment!)

"You remind me of a girl I used to know!"

For now, back into the old days, whirled Orville K. Kent, and back to memories of a pink-lipped girl out West; his first sweetheart, to whom he had been all ingenuously and respectably engaged to be married. These released something in Orville's heart. Curiously, there now slipped out of that heart the sense of amorous escapade with which he had just bolted from the music-hall's party. That feeling was replaced by another, more stable, more chastened. Sentimentality; pure, unashamed sentimentality of a type (one fancies) essentially male.

"Miss Melody," he sighed (and there was no further wish in him to call her "Baby" or to become "fresh"),

"Miss Melody, you take me way back. . . . That homesick feeling is fairly clawing me, if you know what I mean?"

"Rather!" laughed Melody brightly, although homesickness had clawed her too, less than an hour ago. But some reaction decrees that a girl feels at her most unemotional as soon as her male environment begins to give tongue on that particular note. "I know! My French grannie was strong on *mal-de-pays*," she chattered, "and my Welsh grannie used to do you a splendid line called *hireaeth*. No end of songs about the thing, aren't there? '*Carry me back to Ole Virginny*,' . . . '*Ffarwel i ti, Gymru!*' . . . '*And dreaming all the while of Plymouth Ho,*' . . . '*Tampa Bay, you're callin' to me. Tampa Bay, where I want to be—*'"

"You've said it. Oh, gee, 'where I want to be!'" And an elementary, bewildered cowboy who inhabited the shell of this star dancer, began babbling to his girl companion, with tears in his voice, of that place he had been "raised." . . .

To Melody it all sounded so like extracts from a romance by Zane Grey (. . . beat of hoofs down the canyon . . . days in the saddle . . . dust . . . stockades, sunshine and whooping winds . . .) that she realized a fact which dawns but slowly upon the average fiction reader, "There must be a lot of *truth* in novels, after all?"

As they whirled round and past with those wooden prancers, Orville told her the names, colours, characters of horses he had loved; told her who had taught him to ride, and at what stage of his babyhood . . . told her how and where he had spent the years until he was twenty

(at which age he had been found when the film-people had sent out—even as merchants of old despatched adventurers to explore territory for oil, ivory, ore, and other natural riches; sent out their embassies to his wilderness to prospect for new, young, likely-lookin', hard-ridin' cowboys with oodles 'er sex-appeal).

"Until I was twenty I never did a day's work that wasn't all in the open," he told her, ruefully; and at these words Melody, for the second time that night, turned towards an image of the distant Keith. Hardly accurately to be described as "the *open*" that bamboo jungle, tiger-striped with sunshine and shadow, into which Keith's activities had plunged him one hundred and twenty miles away from civilization? Still, Melody half-smiled at her image of the distant Keith, and without dreaming that he was now considerably less distant than that address on his last letter, she turned back to her companion in the coach and said, "I like men to have open-air jobs. It seems more natural, for men. I believe they're always happier in them, too. Men who come to do the roof are always whistling. Workmen pulling up the roads always seem so jolly. I believe they're happier."

"I certainly was," confessed Orville K. Kent. "Say, Miss Melody, I'm going to tell you something in cawnfidence, just because you're so like that little girl I used to know back home—"

Privately Melody thought, "Well, she couldn't have been very *little*; I'm five foot nine and a bit." (Forgetting that the Beloved always loses inches in the eyes of the man.)

Orville was babbling his indiscretions—"I'm wretched

in this life. 'Course I know I'm a *success*, and that I'm bound to be a bigger success. Between you and I, I'm workin' for that. But I shan't stay bein' a star one day after I've gotten enough saved up to get back home, start my own rannch, and run it as I want. I see what there is in this stage racket. I'd give it all for a few friends."

"Friends?" echoed Melody. She was mildly astonished at the genuine unhappiness sounding in this voice from the highly-polished close-up. She thought, "He's getting almost real. Positively the creature isn't bad." She said consolingly, "But you must have millions of friends, Mr. Kent?"

"Me? Don't you believe it. I'll tell you a caption there was goin' to be on a picture I once made. '*A favourite has no friends.*' They cut that because it was too subtle, but I could see the point? It's been the same ever since I got on to the movies. Plenty of worth-while fellows on them! None of the worth-while fellows will have a thing to say to me though. What do they take me for? A bull-orchid."

"A what?"

Here the giddy-go-round, which had been slowing, stopped. Mechanically Orville's hand went out with another fifty-centime piece, but neither he nor Melody noticed the man who came round for fares, nor who got off, nor who got on, as they restarted. Orville was fairly letting himself go, for once, in talk. . . .

II

Themes for conversation alter as fashions change; burning controversy of one generation becomes boredom-

to-extinction for the next: the Shocking, which was once the Freely-discussable, grows to be the Taken-for-granted, and may some day be looked upon once more as the Unmentionable; but, through all the chatter about Harriet, scandal about Queen Elizabeth and the rest of man's babble to man, man's favourite topic of conversation has always been, is, and will remain, Himself.

To talk on that topic to a girl is to the ordinary young man a normal luxury; every-day, essential as is the use of shaving-soap. To Orville (who had become a mere ear, into which was poured babble about the woman's talent, *her* achievements, *her* ambitions, *her* plans for the theatrical season, *her* success in looking younger than other celebrities, *her* publicity, *her* press) the chance of to-night's outpouring was indeed a thrill.

To Melody, this glimpse behind the sheik mask was surprising, touching. ("Poor boy! Not the lizard he looks, then? I shall have to remember all this next time I'm at a cinema. Film history is 'full of these love-making champs;' I wonder how many of them have a secret sorrow? After all, I've seen this one galloping downhill with a foot on each horse, in some circus-picture. . . . Physically, he's no milk-sop. Though," she remembered Anne's warning and laughed, "as for being dangerous, I can't imagine a young man who was less so!")

"Tell me, Mr. Kent," said she, sympathetically, "what is a bull-orchid?"

"What they think a fellow is, if he happens to have eyelashes all that long they get in the way when he shaves, and features that haven't been put together by contract, and his hair fixed right. These smart-alecks make out

that he's a sissy and a flapper's favourite and nothing more to him. . . . Don't you imagine all that's any amusement to me. I went into the movies because I wanted the money for my mother and my ranch. I let 'em rope me into vawdeville because a better salary offered. Times I think it wasn't worth it."

Actual tears on those long lashes, which were such a business asset, blurred for Orville K. Kent the lights of the fair, the grotesque wooden animals, the barley-sugar poles of the giddy-go-round ("*clish, clash!*") whirling him back to the man he had been. The Paris night sky was a rosy blur, a blur his fellow passengers, a blur everything ("*ting, ting!*") but the serious peach face of this Johnson-Brown blonde, listening, sympathetic.

"As for girls, they despise me worse than fellows. Nothing in this theatre that's under forty had ever given me a kind word until you came. . . . What? You think we'd better get off before the next turn? Sure. They are stopping. . . . Well, say, I surely have enjoyed this ride. I cawn't tell you what it's meant to me to have a pretty girl look gently at me for once," exclaimed Orville, as he got himself out of that slowing-down car and slid to earth none too steadily. He was feeling giddy—an ironical trick for Fate to play the galloper downhill, with a foot on each horse, of that circus picture. But he certainly was feeling giddy. Swaying on his glossily-shod feet, he held out a vague hand to help Melody from her seat.

"Somebody young," he added, still holding out the hand, while the lights danced before him. "Do you know what's been my fate? Mator women. Mobs of them

falling for me. Here's another caption for a film, '*Better to be a young girl's darling than a matoor woman's slave.*' That's what I am. Me that hates old ladies!" declared poor, miserable, homesick, girl-sick, and slightly giddy-go-round-sick Orville K. Kent; to emphasize his sentiment he squeezed the hand that had been laid in his. He thought perhaps the girl might snatch it from him. The hand in his was not withdrawn. It responded to his clasp. Held his hand indeed as tightly as if it did not intend to let him go again.

It did not intend to let him go.

For it was not the hand of Melody Wynne that he had taken. Melody still sat where she was in the car, aghast at what she now beheld. Someone had stepped from the car behind it, had come forward. And Orville's hand was being clutched by that small, highly-manicured, curvey little claw of Arabesque.

III

"You did not see I was behind you, darrling, on zis happy-go-round?" asked Arabesque in a voice of extraordinary sweetness. Her glance glittered up into her dancing partner's face, her hand left his to catch the ermine wrap above pearl strings. "Monsieur Bertin and I have also been amusing ourselves on it. We now go back and dance, yes?"

"Sure," gulped Orville, moistening his lips. He was suddenly no more giddy, merely appalled.

A sorry transformation had taken place. At the sight of that redoubtable little woman, their Lady-Boss, the Cowboy he had been (decent, modest, muscular, affec-

tionate and simple soul!) made way for the emasculate Puppet he had become. Once more he was a spectacularly-tailored, massaged and marcelled male Doll for Arabesque; and as such he cringed, thinking of the scene now imminent. . . .

As for young Melody, she skipped lightly down, telling herself, "*I'm* for it!"

CHAPTER IX

THE SACK

*About a telling-off that had
been saved up for a long time*

I

THERE was of course no rule as to what partners you dance with at a theatrical birthday party, or about going on giddy-go-rounds. If any other one of the chorus had been discovered joy-riding with the Patronne's partner, it would not have mattered. But on Melody, the directrix had fixed a jealous eye, ever since that first rehearsal. Anne had warned her. Her captain had warned her. Old Caldy had warned her. Now she'd done it! Without telling, Melody knew that this completely harmless half-hour with a young man for whom she felt nothing but a friendly pity just flavoured with disdain, would be translated into "*behaviour liable to cause scandal in and out of the Theatre.*" Here was crash. (At the thought, Melody Wynne was characteristically stimulated and revv'd up as by any audition.) She waited for the cutting phrase of dismissal. It was a surprise to her (not know-

ing Arabesque's methods) that the directrix should smile up at her with a patronizing, "You 'aving a good time at the party? Yes? We go back."

II

They crossed the Boulevard, Melody walking between Arabesque and Monsieur Bertin. Behind them trailed the wretched deflated Orville, wondering how much the Patronne had overheard of his babblings to the Girl.

"You," continued Arabesque brightly, "are the girl Melody, who dances in the front row?"

They reached the music hall entrance. Bertin pushed open the glass doors. The vestibule was empty, through a corridor, through boxes at the back, through a door, there came the faintest distant din of the party.

"Listen," Bertin said, twinkling. "They will dance until time to set the stage for to-morrow's first number, those ones." Perhaps it was with a touch of the malice of a middle-aged man towards the mature woman that he added to his old flame, "Those that are not stealing out in twos to *rigoler* on the carousel! Ah, *la jeunesse!*"

That was what made Arabesque pause at the door.

Up to that moment she had kept herself marvellously in hand—but over what a seethe of jealous rage with Orville! Because of his appearance he stood for part of her well-engineered eminence; he had become part of her aura of wealth, and was as one with her beautiful apartment on the Champs Elysées, her Riviera villa, her well-trained staff, her cars, pearls, furs, frocks, small golconda of diamonds, and the press publicity that surrounded her. Besides all this he happened to be all that a hard woman

would ever know of tenderness. The French sum it up in the curious word "*béguin*." Not Love as known to romantic people—to Keith Cartwright, say. Not Passion, beautiful and burning, such as (one hopes) might still be in store for Melody and her friends. But, since it was all that Arabesque would ever achieve in this line, be sorry for her; for at this moment her *béguin* had failed her, and she could with pleasure have flung vitriol into his photogenic face. Orville, who owed his position, his introductions, his success, everything, to her—how did he treat her? As the last of the lasts! Lower than the earth! When she had come back from dancing with Bertin, and had looked round for Orville, where was he? Run away from her party. Pléa had said he had gone out to the fair. There on the carousel, Arabesque had found him—this "low traitor"—with one of her own girls. More, that same big stupid English Girl with whom weeks ago Arabesque had foreseen that he was going to make histories. More! The Star could have choked as she thought of the words—the unforgivable, unforgettable insults which with her own ears she had heard him utter. "*Old . . . Old . . .*" Presently Mistaire Orville should pay.

As for that unprintable-classic-string-of-names-for girl? What a choice of excellent reasons for her being told to leave the company—to-morrow. But to-night the *grande* Arabesque would keep up the cordial Bohemian bonhomie for which she was famed in every Paris paper.

She would have kept it up, but for the remark of that wretch Bertin, who, from spite, tried to assume that Arabesque feared the rivalry of Youth. That caused her sup-

pressed fury to flame up, past control. At once, before these men, she must show up this big and bad-dressed English girl; show her up for harmless, for ridiculous. Above all, the men must be shown that this was no rival to an attractive woman; *this?* and round she whisked on Melody.

"Why," Arabesque asked, as if in smiling condescending curiosity, "why you look so nervous? I believe you thought I should be angry? Just because I caught you riding on the jolly-go-round with Monsieur Kent. 'Ow funny!" She threw back her russet head with a staccato laugh. At the sound of it the two men moved, involuntarily, protectively, nearer to the girl.

Melody, still stimulated by the dramatic moment, stood firm. Orville pulled himself together to achieve a screen smile and a conciliatory, "See here, Daisy, you're not going to blame it on to this young lady that I invited her for that bit of a joy-ride—"

At the sound of the American's voice, venturing to use the pet name of private life, the Patronne threw him a glance that stripped his assurance from him. Silent, wilted, the male dancer stood there, first on one foot, then on the other, pale under ochre powder, blinking those exaggerated lashes, and torn between the man he should have been, and the man he had become.

Arabesque, livid, turned again to Melody.

"You were afraid perhaps I give you the bag—sack? Tell you to go, to leave my Company. You sink you are so important, you big English Girl?"

Here the short Frenchwoman drew herself up to the full height of Melody's shoulder; and all that concentrated

intensive importance which Cæsar must have had, which Napoleon had, and which is Nature's consolation prize to the undersized, radiated from Arabesque. She gave that characteristic wave of the hand towards her dancing-partner.

"You sink Monsieur Kent know which of you Girls is which, ze day after ze party? Oh, no. I laugh to sink you sink I make zis a quarrel. Laugh" (She did, shrilly.), "I, Arabesque, laugh at ze idea zat one of my chorus should be chased away for a nussing at all. You understand zat?" (Quite pleased was Arabesque with the unexpected twist which she had given to the end of this scene.) "Of course you do not go."

"I am going!" said Melody Wynne. Thereby giving a more unexpected twist to a scene not yet at its end.

The men stared. The *grande Arabesque* looked as if her face had slipped. One of her chorus went on talking as if she were the star, not in hysterical wrath, but in even clear tones of indignation. "You may not sack me, but I sack you. I've had quite enough of working for you. I'm fed. I'll tell you why!"

Pause, in which perhaps the Fates turned their eyes upon this insignificant atom of stage life, Melody Wynne, hesitating between alternative destinies for her.

Bertin the Frenchman thought, "Delicious, this girl. Even in that miserable little robe of two sous, a beauty. And personality. Might she not be taught, made into a Star? More has been done, with less. Even, she speaks well."

"Before I go, I'll tell you what I think of you. Somebody ought to," Melody said authoritatively to Ara-

besque. "You pose as a generous warm-hearted woman, because you dance for nothing at the opera charity balls. What does it mean? Extra work for your chorus, kept up to all hours, without a biscuit, without a thank-you!"

Rapidly Bertin thought—"Amusing if I could produce her thus, now, none knowing whence she came. Or, even, with all Paris knowing the history of her embroilment with Arabesque? Piquant, that?"

Rapidly Orville Kent thought: "Here's where I might butt in. Say, *'The young lady don't need your job, Daisy. No more do I. I've gotten enough saved, I guess. Any Casino King would jump at me for an exhibition-dancer, with partner. Right now she and I are going to fix up an act, Melody and Kent!'* What's the matter with my telling her?"

Neither man spoke.

Colonel Wynne's youngest daughter kept her clear stare on Arabesque's face (which was distorted, which wavered like reflections in a pool of water that has been violently stirred up) and dashed on—

"It got into the papers that when one of your dressers fell ill, you paid for her nursing home, and went, yourself, to see her. Big photographs of you stepping out of your Rolls with arms full of flowers that you were taking to your sick dresser. Just for the advertisement! Nothing else! Because, if any dresser in the theatre hadn't subscribed nearly the whole of one evening's pay for your birthday present she'd have been sacked. They all knew that. I went to your party too, Arabesque. I am sorry now that I did. But that's no use. At least I can tell

you that I didn't subscribe a sou, because I thought, and I do think, that you owed us all a party. Anyhow, as you don't dismiss me, I'll *go!* on my own."

Bertin, the French music hall director, here mentally shrugged powerful shoulders. He had not seriously thought of taking and launching a girl from this chorus. If he, Bertin, had to offend the great Arabesque, it would not be because of one more little Girl Anglaise, however shapely, however delectable, however original. Pity, but that girl must go. With that shrug the Frenchman, metaphorically, stepped back.

The young American murmured, "Say—"

But he was not going to say that he too sacked his job and meant to start a dancing act with Melody. He was still dependent on the music hall owner. Good-bye, dream of independence! Hope of escape in Youth's Company, farewell! All he could suggest was that "if there's any unpleasantness I—I guess I'm to blame—"

"You?" exclaimed Arabesque, finding her voice as she realized that just possibly she might have difficulties with a restive Orville.

Her world knew him as Arabesque's elegant slave. But in the biography of any Star there are pages never to be published; there are secret earthquakes, unexpected turnings of the tables, when some obscure, undreamt-of person (it may be a mother, a husband, an old servant) takes for the moment the upper hand. The trained tiger, who has also become a Turn, has been known to turn upon and maul his trainer. Orville might some day leave her! Arabesque's mature material heart knew this one

emotion and fear. He might soon leave her! So she turned to him with a dazzling smile; her gesture, reflected in the picture-glass of one of her own photographs on the vestibule wall, the one that showed Arabesque and partner kissing over a hedge of artificial roses.

"Why, darrleeng, it is now you who are being funny! Who mentions it, blame? If somebody is not 'appy under My management, I much prefair she go. Good-bye, good luck, good rid."

With her hand in Orville's arm she walked to the door that he mechanically pushed open. A muffled burst of jazz wafted from the stage, mingled with Arabesque's curtain line as the three well-known people went back to the party, leaving Melody, one of the chorus, standing there in the bright empty vestibule—"All the world knows there are fifty, 'undred, fresh girls, for one who"—her hand tightened on her partner's arm, her voice rose in triumph with her last word—"who goes!"

PART III

WITH THE VAGABOND SHOW

CHAPTER X

LOOSE END

About when home is not a home; about a journey that ended in a friendship's beginning; about what makes for a peaceful marriage; and about what some of these mountebanks were like off the stage

I

"WHATEVER on earth," mourned Melody's exasperated Clique, "is Melody going to do now?"

It certainly was a black outlook. "You couldn't have chosen a worse time to go and play the ass!" declared Anne in affectionate fury. "Here we are in August, September nearly. In Paris there will be no getting in anywhere for you. Nor for that matter in London!"

"'Always look on the bright side, Hanne,'" quoted Melody, resolutely gay. "Yes; it's a loose end again. England, Home and Resting."

"Well, consider yourself lucky, my dear, that you have got a good home to rest in!" Needless to say that this was Mamie.

To whom Melody nearly retorted that in spite of all this sob-stuff about home, it was a prison directly you had nowhere else to go. Especially when it happened to be run by one of these super-home-makers (poor Steppy, who "minded" even the picture of Melody's pretty French mother on Daddy's dressing-room table! Who, also, incidentally, minded that dressing-room; how bitterly she would mind seeing Daddy's favourite child turn

up again, like a bad penny, months before her time! "Must try not to get on Steppy's nerves as badly as I did after I got back from the Leotard tour!" Steppy, as Melody knew, would have one's room at Lilac Lodge all ready; perfect from re-painted ceiling to fresh lining-paper and lavender-bag put into all drawers. Everything to welcome one—except the feeling of welcome. Still . . .).

"As for resting," declared Melody, "it does make you feel, in the words of the dear old song, '*There Ain't No Fun Like Work*,' and I've got to leave you happily at it—!"

Loyally the Clique abstained from telling Melody they had warned her what would happen. Only little Ginger begged her, wherever she got to next, ter make a bolt for it as soon as she caught sight of a dark fellow. That Orville had been dangerous all right, only she didn't believe that was what was meant. That Orville wasn't going to be the last of them. Peculiar gift, the fortune teller said, and dramatic talent, so look out!

"But what, Melody, when you do get back to London?"

"God knows, Sybil." The buoyancy was wearing a thought thin, now that Melody had got her big trunk packed, strapped, and labelled; but she still smiled over the packing of her mother's old pigskin dressing-case. "I suppose I shall go round the shows and see which of them are hopeless enough to get into on my card. Sit on the agents' doorsteps, hoping for the best, and reading advertisements in the jolly old *Era*."

"Can't you put one in yourself?"

"What's the good, Hanne? No human soul has heard

my name. I've never had a part like you, you Duchess. However, 'a way will open'; there'll be something."

Later Anne privately suggested: "I suppose, darling, you won't really worry about work?"

"Darling, I shan't worry, but I shall work."

With a fresh spurt of bravado she hummed—

"—there ain't no joy like toil!
Up in the morning wet or dry.
Keep on workin' till the clouds roll by!
Old soldiers *nev*-er die,
They'd miss their Army Club!"

She snapped the dressing-case to "Work? Leap at the first chance I get. Even if it is only in a Punch and Judy show."

"But listen, darling; when is your nice Keith coming home from Ind—"

"Good God. Girl, do you imagine I should dream of getting parasitically engaged to a man, at this juncture? Certainly not to Keith."

II

For on this subject Melody, to add to her other difficulties, was experiencing an inconsistency which no man would understand. (Girls perhaps may sympathize.)

Last May, when the man, all in the middle of trams and prams and string bags, had asked Melody to marry him, she had promptly replied: "My dear! What an awful and appalling thought." But actually she would have found it easier to marry him then than she would find it now. That good-bye in the garden, that long passionate Lilac look, had indubitably changed her to-

wards Keith. Not that she liked him less (on the contrary, you must have noticed how not only she thought of him oftener, but she thought more of him!). But she also thought: "As for writing out to India, 'Dear Keith, My stage job crashed, so if yours is still open I'll take it.' I can't; I just couldn't."

She added, even more urgently, though silently, "Especially not after the brand of love-letters he writes. No fear!" Aloud, she went on reckoning up: "Second class ticket to Victoria, one pound ten. Taxis and tips . . ."

III

The Clique as one girl pressed loans upon her.

"Melody, you take this fifty francs; never knew I had it . . ."

"What luck; I've found an English ten-shilling note slipped into my passport. Evidently meant for you, darling."

"'Ere!" said Ginger, with a handful of francs. "Come in 'andy for those saucy 'ounds of porters at Boulong."

The francs were all that Melody would take. After she had paid her hotel bill she had, after all, two hundred and forty-five francs left. She told everybody she was in funds; that she felt she would soon be working again.

Actually—before even the most optimistic of them all could have hoped it, Melody Wynne was again working.

It happened thus.

IV

Having left the Gare du Nord by an early train, she endured a journey of four hours full of gloomy reflection.

Her fellow-passengers in that carriage were a couple of travelling British spinsters; silent, disapproving, so that not a word of human speech did this forlorn girl hear, until the train stopped at the Boulogne Gare Maritime, and she clambered down the high steps to find, after the usual scrimmage with porters, struggles with luggage, passport officials, and money changers, that the Folkestonebound passengers were to proceed no further.

"Why, what's happened?" demanded Melody, with the rest of the travelling public.

Only the voice of Pandemonium answered; so Melody made her way up on the wharfside to a large, roseate pleasant official who wore the cap of Cook's man.

"No, that's right. Boats aren't going. No getting back to the young man in old England to-day," said Cook's man, dealing out a fatherly smile to the group including Melody Wynne. He jerked his head towards the harbour's mouth. "Weather don't permit."

"But why not—?"

"Ha, now you're asking," said Cook's man, in high good humour. "Funny 'ow everybody comes to me to know why the weather does this, that or the other, what sort of a crosin' it's going to be and why. Think I know everything. Jack-of-all-trades, that's what I am! But I can't tell you what it is, lady, that's made the sea turn nasty. Result of this 'ere depression over Iceland we hear so much about, I suppose? Ha, ha. Nothing doing until to-morrer now. Have to wire your friends. Know your way to the post office, I suppose? Over the bridge and to the right."

Melody, still quite as depressed as anything over Ice-

land, still thinking, "My luck's dead out. Perhaps I shall have seven months of a cycle of misfortune before anything goes right again," sought the Post Office. Wired to her father at Lilac Lodge, and turned to the swing doors. The question now arose: how she was going to spend this wasted day?

Drifting about the grimmest seaport town in France, all alone, was going to be very poor fun. The Girl Anglaise, accustomed to living in a buzz of chatter, accustomed to the perpetual companionship of so many other girls of the music hall, felt as if all lights had suddenly been turned off. More than anything, she longed for someone to speak to, and in this mood she moved slowly down the steps of the Boulogne Post Office, below which is the stopping-place for rickety little motor omnibuses that ply between Boulogne and Wimereux, Pont de Briques, Equihen, and La Falaise.

And in those few minutes that she stood there, Fate arranged what was to turn out one of the most important encounters of Melody's life. Important for more than one reason. But one is enough to begin with. This chance meeting was to put Keith's adored girl back into a job. The merest chance . . . All because she was just watching the blue La Falaise bus disgorging, at the stopping-place, its cargo of aproned women bent down with baskets and bundles. Then, struggling out of this crowd, emerged the quartette that Melody noticed—a man, his wife, and their two flapper-daughters, who all looked so noticeably different from the toil-worn grave soberly-clad fisherfolk.

The man of the party was dark, clean-shaven, wore

a dashing sombrero and a showily cut larkspur-blue "Charleston" suit. His arm was protectively held by a wife much larger than he, who wore a travelling coat of such huge black-and-white checks, with a small red hat so audacious, that she looked lurid—until you saw her face; pink, serene, and blamelessly respectable. Skipping along with them came the two hatless, bare-armed summery young daughters, and all four seemed in a state of the wildest excitement.

Theatrical people, Melody recognized at once. A Turn out of the Casino, perhaps?

In any case their children, though theatrical, were as carefully brought up as any on that Coast; for when one of them brushed against Melody on the pavement, she was immediately checked by her mother's rebukeful "Mariette! One says, 'Pardon me, Mademoiselle'."

"For nothing, Mademoiselle," returned Melody politely. She caught the eye of the large woman. It was so full of benevolent human interest that Melody, the girl out of a job, and thirsting for companionship, smiled, hesitated, turned back to ask if Madame could tell her of a little corner, not too dear, where one could lunch?

That was the beginning of it.

V

Melody, lunching at a little table on the pavement outside the café, had scarcely finished her omelette when she beheld these people passing again. The flappers screamed a greeting, skipped across the street, and presently all four of them joined the English demoiselle. They asked permission to join her at lunch.

"Enchanted," said Melody. She made room at her table for the French quartette (who seemed exhausted and at their wit's end about something). With the same gesture, she made room for her Chance.

"Well!" said the mother of the family, taking a deep breath, and fanning herself with the menu, "I have done all I can. If she has gone, leaving no address, can I do more? It is tiresome, Mademoiselle"—here she turned candid eyes upon Melody—"when one thinks one has found the solution and, behold, nothing to be done!"

The bewildered Melody agreed it was tiresome. She was just going to ask what all the trouble was about, when the father of the family took and held for some moments the centre of the stage.

He began by complimenting Mademoiselle on her French, when, obviously, Mademoiselle was English. Then he proudly announced that he had visited England, had sung tenor in 1908 at "le Covent Garden."

"Would you think, Mademoiselle, that for twenty-four years now I have made the stage? Ah but yes, in every French colony. All the grandest cities of the world; Calcutta, Colombo, Tunis, Saigon, Port Said—two hundred rôles I have; I sing 'Cloches de Corneville,' I sing 'Daughter of the Regiment,' I sing 'The Mountebanks,'" he poured out, while his family listened indulgently to Papa, in the vein. "My best rôle is the young Prince." (He was, Melody thought, at least fifty-two, in spite of his hair, a suspect inky black, and a skin which, thanks to the use of cocoa butter, had remained smooth and unlined, or fifty-three? Years older than his wife, who obviously dry-nursed him.) "The young prince in the Grand Mo-

gul. A fortunate rôle to me! Ah, one has lucky and unlucky rôles, lucky and unlucky mascots." He thrust out a wrist which, under a frayed shirt-cuff, wore a bracelet dangling the mascot of a hand in filigree gold. "This, for example, given me when I made Algiers; the Municipal Theatre at Tunis . . . Africa I know well . . . I sing also 'The Waltz Dream'—" He broke off, with appropriate gesture, in a husky, well-trained remnant of a voice that arrested several passers-by in the street, into a rendering of—

"Valse divine,
Valse d'amour"—

while one of the little daughters smiled ingratiatingly at Melody across the *hors d'œuvres*, and piped up, "It's gay, the stage!"

Whereupon her father's tone altered.

"Gay? It's a job for youth, the stage," he groaned dramatically, setting down his empty glass. "As long as one is young, it is amusing to live on the wing, to-day here, to-morrow gone. You cannot imagine, Mademoiselle, how one is the victim of circumstances," he sighed to Melody, the resting chorus girl. "They say we are thriftless, we players. How can we save? Comes a bad year. Comes a strike. One eats all one's savings, and, when one grows old, what awaits one?" The practised voice sank. "Death in the hospital or the gutter." The practised voice rose. "I, if I had my time over again, would go back to my studies of medicine. Or, if I could, I would take another job. See how my wife laughs. She believes me not."

The pleasant pink-faced wife, with her mouth full of ham, told Melody that her husband so loved his job that if he left it he would die of monotony. Was it not his life? "Me, I am not thus. I would far rather run a little thriving grocery shop. How much better than the profession, where one has no home, where one stays a month in every place, and, whether one leaves with gladness or regret, always one has to leave." Taking a generous knife-full of food, she concluded, "A dog of a life!"

"Then why, Madame L'Artiste, did you take to it?"

"Why, Mademoiselle? But, because!" She turned her serene gaze to the husband, who beamed deprecatingly, murmured, "This good Nanette," seized her hand, fondled it while she talked, and remained untouched by the truth that to her the actor was just another cherished tiresome child.

"He, René, this one, was only beginning when first I made his acquaintance. Me, I was then in the *caisse* of my father's shop; a big butchery, very important. We met; he was alone, he had worries, how could I leave him? I had to make the stage also," she shrugged plump shoulders, "so that I could follow to Belgium, travel with him, take care of his things. Me, I was of course untrained; he taught me all I know—"

"In marriage, Mademoiselle," explained René, "there must be give and take."

"News!" scoffed Nanette, affectionately. "Forget not to tell Mademoiselle also that the only peaceful marriage is that in which the 'give' is all done by one side and the 'take' all by the other. It matters not greatly which

(though I think better the giver be the woman, to her it comes more natural!) but, at least, let not both try to do some of each. Good advice. For the *gosses*, too. (One says, 'Yes, mamma, I will remember.')" With a wink she turned back to Melody and continued the family-history. "My elder girl, Pierrette" (she nodded at the sixteen-year-old) "is like me; a good cook, good housekeeper. Mariette, the littlest one, resembles René. Born for the boards! Just now she plays the consumptive boy of 'The Two Little Vagabonds.' You know this pretty death scene, where, in dying, he falls back on his foster mother's bosom, and sighs with his last breath: 'Forget not me who was for one week your little boy.'"

The interpreter of this rôle again repeated that she found the stage very gay; her sister declaring she found it more gay to make the cinema, while Melody, forgetting her own troubles, found most gay their conversation. She liked the temperamental ex-Covent Garden tenor, who showed off like a harmless friendly child; liked his domesticated wife who ran the family, liked the pretty flappers, all gabble and skip. Interested, she at last got in her question about the show in which they were now playing.

At the moment, she was told they toured in a repertory company, with drama, operetta, opera comique. They had come into Boulogne because—"Mon Dieu! One of our principals, our leading lady, Mademoiselle Monteux, simply left the camp at a moment's notice. Which means that for her rôles we have to take first this one of the chorus, then that one of the chorus. All is changed; all

upset. For me it is ignoble, thus letting down the man-agement, the comrades! Suddenly Nanette has this idea of a substitute, a lady we know who was once with us in the South of France. We had heard she gives dancing lessons here in Boulogne; an atelier, in a street near the cathedral. We sought her; gone."

"Gone?" Melody took up swiftly, "and this job in your troupe still going begging? Tell me, I speak French like you—I sing a little, dance—yes, I can dance! I was in Paris in revue, with Madame Arabesque— You know? The vedette Arabesque."

There was a fourfold shriek. "Not possible! Mademoiselle is in the *métier*? Why then, not tell us?" (As if there had been any opening!) There was a fourfold gape upon this tall, shapely blonde in the usual two-guinea coat, the inevitable felt hat, the nude stockings, the plaited Number Four-sized shoes, and the one touch of another life—her mother's old dressing-case on the chair beside her.

"One thought Mademoiselle was rich, rich, rich! Travelling alone."

"Travelling back to England to seek another job," retorted Melody ruefully, "since I have lost mine in Paris."

Here Mariette the Little Vagabond burst in with her suggestion. "If Mademoiselle is of the *métier*, why should not Mademoiselle take up the rôles left empty by Mademoiselle Monteux?"

VI

Instantly applauded by her sister, this idea. Instantly applauded by her father. There was a plan! Why seek

further? Since this charming demoiselle needed work, why not take her back with them to La Falaise? It was done; it was Heaven-sent; it was meant!

Only Madame Nanette shook her head. What were they all thinking about? This demoiselle, it was not likely she would attach herself to a company of which she knew nothing?

"We lodge in caravans, Mademoiselle. And better a comfortable van with a nice cooking-stove," Nanette said, "than to lodge in some dirty furnished apartment where the landlady thinks of nothing all day long except how to rob. For me, better. But, for Mademoiselle, far too Bohemian!"

"Untrue!" protested René. "Mademoiselle being an artiste, would not expect luxury. Come, Mademoiselle."

And Melody, the rash, the impulsive; Melody who three months ago tossed up as to whether it should be India or Paris, marriage or stage dancing, laughed joyfully. "I'm coming to see what it's like!"

Whereupon both the young girls clapped their hands, with shrieks of joy. "Oh, how marvellous to have Mademoiselle with us in the troupe! You'll come back with us now to interview the management?"

CHAPTER XI

GIPSY PITCH

*About an unromantic setting
to one romantic figure; and
about the way to get rich*

I

THEY took the rickety motor-bus out to La Falaise.

Now La Falaise is the kind of resort of which certain enthusiasts, who go there year after year, will tell you. "Oh, we think there's nowhere like it, but tastes differ. It's just a steep fishing village full of smells and costumes and atmosphere; a tiny bay and an old fort. So don't *you* go, if you expect *le confort moderne*, or a casino. The only form of 'night-life' is that Travelling Show pitched in the market square. If you're not above going where it's dirty and deafening, and smelly, you might find it amusing—"

Melody Wynne found it a shock.

As one of the chorus, she had of course toured until she had grown hardened to the provinces' cheapest furnished apartments, to their inevitable lumpy bed, hideous oil-cloth, sinister bathroom, and the rest. That Paris hotel bedroom she had shared with Anne was hardly spacious. Here, in the little village where Parisian shopkeepers take an economical holiday among the toilers of the sea, she looked forward to something picturesquely amusing. The family René, though flashy in town clothes, were, after all, decently groomed, of civilized (though Continental) manners. So, as samples of the Theatre Platt, they scarcely prepared the English girl for her first impression, when, after a ten minutes' trip out of Boulogne

in the blue motor-bus, she was piloted by her new friends to the market-square.

"Tuesday, you see, is market day," Nanette pointed out, stepping over grey ooze of a mediæval gutter. "Practical for our marketing to have stalls pitched so close to our vans; but these people leave it dirty enough!"

"Truly," murmured Melody, blank. She looked upon a plain of ash-can rubbish. . . .

For though the stalls had been struck at mid-day, an uncleared-away mess of cabbage stalks, broken glass, waste paper, empty tins, and every sort of vegetable, animal and mineral litter (in which nosed unclassifiable dogs, among which played unspeakably filthy-faced fisher-children) still filled the Square.

Three sides of that Square were bordered by poor-looking houses, a café, some dark little shops. On the fourth side rose the big church; and cheek by jowl with it, were parked a long show-tent of dingiest grey canvas, a cart with posters, and twelve gipsy vans with the announcement "Grand Theatre Platt." Nothing that looked in the least picturesque!

The pitiless light of an afternoon, windy, clear, but sunless, destroyed any scrap of glamour that might hang about the Vagabond Show. It's at night that you see its romance; its shadowy mysterious bulk, its rosy-lighted windows upon which move a "Warning shadows" -like show of silhouettes, while the entrance to the huge show-tent is marked by an inviting blaze of naphtha flares. But in broad daylight—ah, no! Hard to say which looked more depressing, place or people?

On wooden steps of the vans crouched women (com-

pared with whom Melody's late dresser would have appeared chic). One was cleaning a rabbit, others peeling vegetables into buckets. On an upturned hamper sat a six-year-old child, thin as a daddy-long-legs, with her hair in metal curlers, who was nursing a black kitten, while a group of men in shirt-sleeves, collarless, unshaven, lounged about smoking, reading the *Journal*, and whitening canvas shoes.

Even the buoyant heart of Colonel Wynne's youngest daughter sank as she gazed about.

"Heavens, what a dump!" she thought. "They're all staring. Nobody looks as if they'd washed for weeks. Where could they, anyhow, in these hen-coops? Where do they dress and make-up? As for baths, egad! What on earth *does* one do?"

"Pierrette and Mariette, prepare a good little coffee in our van," ordered their mother, "while we take Made-moiselle to the management."

"Hardly worth while?" thought Melody rapidly. "All very well for me to tell the girls I'd take the nearest Punch-and-Judy job that offered. Must it be this? I suppose it's this or home? Afraid it'll have to be 'Home, Dearie, Home'—" Lilac Lodge. . . . Steppy all out to take offence at everything Melody did, said, or looked. The endless irritation of living as daughter of the house when it is so obviously another woman's house. Even her brother Bill, when he hadn't anything better to occupy him, had his own girl. It would be awful at home.

"Then will it have to be this? The show promised to be a rag. But except for these four nice people who picked me up, everything is the last word in squalor. Oh,

it would be impossible . . . not a redeeming gleam to make it fun. Nothing intriguing! Nothing romantic . . .”

II

At the moment of first impressions, such trifles turn the balance, this way or that.

Now at this instant, Melody's eye was caught by one "gleam." Down the steps of a red and yellow caravan on the right, there moved the figure of a man, young, cat-like, slinky, who looked arrestingly different from any of these others lounging against the wooden walls. He was not as they were in shirt-sleeves; he wore a fisherman's dark woollen jersey, high to his throat, long at the wrists, and closely fitting his slender shape; he wore dark trousers, white-laced espadrilles on his feet, and a peaked cloth cap into the side of which he had stuck a red carnation. Such a quick sideways glance he threw at René, his wife, and the stranger! Oddly towny, he looked like any young man you might expect to drift in at a studio party in the more "extreme" circles of Bloomsbury, Greenwich Village, or Montparnasse—the sort of young man who would Charleston in that highnecked sweater, talking to his partner about Sterilization of the Unfit, through the cigarette in his teeth.

This apparition, however, removed the cigarette with an unexpectedly graceful gesture, as he stopped in front of the René's to give them an ingratiating, "Bonjour. You are returned from Boulogne?"

"As you see!" retorted René shortly, going on.

Why, Melody wondered, should they be up-stage with this pleasant young man, so appropriately picturesque,

and what Teddy Marvell would call "*Oh-darling-so-truly-travelling-Theatre*," such a type, with his ridiculous red carnation?

Such trifles turn the balance this way or that, at the moment of first impressions.

Actually the sight of this one player (who even in that bleak light, in that squalid Place, with dirty paper blowing all over it, contrived to look romantic) struck a note, gave colour, and encouraged in Melody her characteristic careless Wynne optimism. That young man looked as if he were doing this for fun? Perhaps after all this Vagabond Show might not be too bad? These Rénés managed? Nanette and her daughters who talked about its being gay, remained fresh as roses. Why shouldn't Melody? Rather than go home with her tail between her legs to mope, sponge on Daddy, put Steppy's back up, why shouldn't she take on a few weeks' utterly fresh experience? Back came Melody's well-known audition mood, making all things possible. Escorted by René and his wife to the steps outside the management's caravan, she was not discouraged even by her first sight of Monsieur and Madame Platts.

"Bonjour, Madame," said René to the old witch in frowsy shawls. "Bonjour, Monsieur le Directeur," he smiled at the rip of seventy-four who looked like some disreputable outside porter in aged corduroys, with a chauffeur's old cap, from under which grimy white locks hung around his wrinkled, scoundrelly Voltaire face.

"I present to you a young lady who will be your affair for those rôles of Mademoiselle Monteux."

The Platts fastened glances of merciless intelligence

upon this Girl Anglaise. The Girl gave her wide surprised stare back at the Platts.

III

They were amazing. . . . But even more so when, later on, she was told how rich they were; ah, but how rich, rich, rich, the proprietor and proprietress of this show!

She, who sat at the receipt of custom in those frowsy cast-offs munching forever those whelks; her spouse who mooched about in tattered corduroys tending to the one miserable raw-boned nag of the show-cart, these positive tramps, it appeared according to Monsieur René, were (dramatically he flung out his hand and rubbed together his thumb and forefinger) rolling in money! Ah, they live like this in the summer, economically. They know the way to get rich! They do themselves well enough, those, when they make the winter in the town.

"Have they a house?" asked Melody.

"A house? They have a street," announced Nanette. "Incredible house-property, they have. Remember, a show like this is very much more solid, for example, than a Paris theatre; that tent holds twelve hundred, and when do you see an empty place? It is a good profit for the proprietors, and not much do they lose on the salaries they pay their artistes. René, the *gosses*, and I, for our combined talent, get four hundred francs a month!"

Melody, rapidly calculating: "A pound a week for the lot?"

"It is ignoble," enlarged René. "In Paris these brigands of Platts, when engaging their artistes, dress poorly for the purpose. If an artiste demands more, they weep

for poverty. 'How could I give it to you when I have it not myself?' And all the time their note-cases are full of money. Of bank notes; full, full, full, I tell you!"

"Then these people," said Melody, "are in their ways not so unlike my last *directrix*, the *grande Arabesque*?"

"More than probable. It is not by being open-handed," declared Nanette, "that one grows rich. It is not by being generous to those less fortunate, that one becomes in this *sale métier*, a success!"

But this she said later.

IV

In the cavernous gloom of the empty show tent the newcomer was put through the briefest audition. Monsieur Platt, after whistling for the pianist, who was not to be found, called to his wife: "Thou! Canst not play a tune for Mademoiselle to sing?" Waddling to the travelling piano, Madame Platt plumped down and produced airs from "The Merry Widow." Melody's inconspicuous true treble rose: "Vilia, O Vilia, the witch of the wood—"

"Enough," grunted the proprietor.

Madame Platt played on. Melody took a few steps across the rough-boarded stage.

"Not too bad," grunted old Platt.

Melody thought: "It's more unspeakable than any tour yet. Well. It may be awful, but it can't be *long*. I can't be sacked, egad! Nothing can *happen*. The entire show breaks up at the end of the summer season. So what about 'in for a penny, in for a pound'?"

Literally, the pound was offered to her.

One hundred and twenty francs was the weekly salary offered to this Girl Anglaise by the management Platt, with (after some haggling) the magnificent caravan and the use of the costumes of Mademoiselle Monteux, thrown in. The clinching feature was Nanette's pointing out that, for the pieces with modern dress, Mademoiselle could seek her luggage left in the Gare at Boulogne; already Mademoiselle was beautifully dressed.

"First time that's been said of me!" thought Melody Wynne—it was indeed all she could ever do to clothe becomingly that sumptuous form. Too tall to be stock-size, too young to be out-size, the effective inexpensive models into which nine out of ten of her mates could step, were not, alas, for her.

Old Madame Platt, groaning over the bad bargain she was making, now took down Melody's home address.

v

Here, before Melody's mind's eyes rose faces of her home people. Daddy's. The various married sisters' and brother's. Bill's. But particularly that prim, once-pretty face of Steppy's as it had looked when confronted with certain of "poor Melody's" impossibly "common" friends. Not one of them, not even Ginger, would she have considered as impossible as these Vagabonds . . . French, too! (For when she had exhausted every other grouse against the family, Steppy could always fall back on the Wynne's foreign strain.)

Mentally, Melody heard a family chorus protesting, "My dear! Don't be so preposterous. There are limits. You can't possibly take this job."

Even, she heard a distant echo of Keith's restrained nice boyish voice: "You *can't*, Melody."

"Why not?" said Melody Wynne.

CHAPTER XII

CARAVAN

About the last stronghold of domesticity

I

YOUNG Melody, who had taken on the Paris job with such high hopes bounding of adventure and fun, only to find it fizzle out in disillusionment and distaste, told herself that she was taking on this preposterous circus shop without illusions. This would be just a fill-in. Hard work, roughing it, and nothing happening but a certain amount of unintentional humour. . . . Be warned, ladies. Having made up your minds in this spirit, it is possible you may be entering upon the most devastatingly adventurous slice of your lives. Thus Melody, all unsuspecting, followed the Rénés to be fortified with that good little coffee which their girls had prepared in the caravan.

II

Those of you who have gone down to the sea in ships, and who have suffered from the constricted narrowness of cabin-life, will have an idea of the accommodation for this touring family. Their van was the replica of that in which Melody was to take up her abode, so that in describing it I describe Melody's new quarters; only you

will remember that there was only one of her; there were four Rénés.

Their van was not more than six foot by nine from end to end. It was not too low, since neither tall Melody nor Nanette bumped their heads when standing up; but it was low enough for one to read the text under the cut-out newspaper portraits of Mary Pickford, Rudolph Valentino, Raquel Meller, Arabesque, Tom Mix, Maurice Chevalier, Orville K. Kent, Josephine Baker, and Rintin-Tin, all pasted up on the wooden ceiling.

To enter the caravan you went up the wooden ladder of six steps, and found that six-foot-nine space divided into three rooms, each of them kept as neat as a doll's house belonging to a grown-up. These Vagabonds were perforce meticulously neat. Nothing was thrown about, left out, or in any but the right place. What space is there to be untidy in a six-foot-nine caravan? Its first division held that square flat-topped French cooking stove, pride of Nanette's heart, *à propos* of which:—"Since Mélodie is English and therefore will not understand food—*n'est-ce pas?*" said this French housewife with her unperturbed facing of facts, "better is it that she has her meals in here with us, paying her share of the marketing, since for me to cook for one more is nothing. And often, that way, one obtains larger and better pieces of meat. (Mariette, thou wilt now run down to the butcher's and secure for me that veal promised. The bag, child! Take the shopping bag. One does not walk up the street carrying meat in a bit of paper, in the hand like the ill-educated!") Her hung-up pots and pans, the cupboard for dishes, cups, glasses, cutlery, her small safe for groceries, her irons

and ironing-board, her box with household linen, and a dress basket for costume, labelled "*Troupe théâtrale.*"

You took a step into the second division. This was the family eating and living room. It had the largest table, four fold-up canvas-seated chairs. Many photographs adorned it of René in his operatic rôles, also a bouquet of cotillon-flowers in a vase of ruby glass. The couple of berths on which the two young girls slept were not at first visible to the eye, but against each wall there were set cartons and dress baskets.

"Egad," muttered Melody, regarding these. She, with the rest of Arabesque's chorus, had been accustomed to scream "*Habilleuse!*" at Madame Querlin, so that there might be whisked away from where she dropped them at her feet, the various stage costumes; these would then be hauled up to the corridor roof, where they hung like vast coloured tropic flowers, and with which their wearer would have nothing to do until the time came again to shriek "*Habilleuse!*" when Madame Querlin would again run to pass the costume over her head, to hook up, to shake out. Nothing of that sort about dressing in a van. Every day costumes have to be brought out, ironed, worn, folded up, put away again by their owner. The René wardrobe was kept faultlessly folded up as the petals of an unopened peony bud. Nanette, that born mother, who realized that she now had one more dependent creature to take to her expansive bosom, promised to teach the art of folding and keeping her clothes to the English girl. In passing, she arranged for her laundry; this could be entrusted to a girl of the troupe (who ironed, it appeared,

like a dream. Was she not the daughter of a washer-woman?).

In the last compartment, set against the end of the van, was the large, wooden, characteristically important French double bed in which slept the tenor and his wife. Fine square pillows they had, in such snowy pillow cases, edged with such faultless crochet-lace (handiwork of Nanette), and such a plump, red eiderdown on which rested a ball of black fur; that kitten which Melody had noticed with the curl-papared child in the square. Under that bed was stacked a heavy wooden trunk showing the painted legend "*Troupe théâtrale*," with labels of half the towns in Europe, whilst against the available wall space were set baskets and cartons (more "*Troupe théâtrale*" labels) containing more of those costumes.

Apobos of costumes, it was then that knocks sounded upon the window-pane; Nanette drew aside a spotless curtain, and Melody overheard the following colloquy through the caravan window:

"Bonjour, Madame l'Artiste!" in effusive boyish tones.

"Bonjour, Messieurs-dames" (in a guarded voice from Nanette), there is something I can do for the young ladies and gentlemen?"

"Oh, if you please! To-night at the *cinema des familles*, grand fancy-dress dance for the visitors—"

"I knew it. You will excuse me, but never more can I consent to allow my beautiful costumes to—"

"*Maman!*" in a beseeching whisper from Pierrette in the van, "it is only the young Monsieur and his sisters from the villa on the cliff; he is going to pay a bottle of

champagne for all of us if you will only lend him for to-night the Empire uniform and the dresses; the blue, the rose-colour!"

"Lend?" in rapid-fire murmur from her mother. "Firstly, I lend nothing to *visitors*, of whom I have experience! Secondly, I *lend* nothing. Something at least one learns from consorting with misers like the Management Platt. Thou canst tell the young Monsieur from the villa that the Empire uniform is to be hired—thou hearest?—*hired* for seven francs. It is not with two tears of cheap champagne that one obtains the use of first-rate theatrical costumes; as for the blue, the rose-colour, no! Too good for those brats to dance in, to tear the flounces, to ruin me with spilt *cassis*, and perspiration under the sleeve-holes, and what do I know! Good enough for them if thou findest the old green gown, the yellow muslin which thou wouldst have torn up into cleaning-rags, and which I kept expressly for hiring out. For five francs they can have those. . . ."

Colloquies without.

Presently: "*Merci, Madame l'Artiste!*" in a slightly dashed tone of voice.

"They, who think me the last word in disobligingness because I will not give them the better dresses," added Nanette, with her wink, aside. "But how can I afford to let all my nice things be ruined by the Public? Nothing so careless, so maladosity, so com-pletely *undomesticated* as the young daughters of an Audience," declared the Mountebank's wife, good-naturedly enough. "Eh bien . . . Pierrette! Thou canst also, if thou wilt, put with the dresses a little of the maquillage left behind by Mon-

teux; those brats will have none for their fancy dress, and Mélodie—yes? has brought her own.”

By the way, I forget to ask you to notice the dresser in that outermost or kitchen cubby-hole. It was roughly the size of two spread-out pocket-handkerchiefs of René’s, and was topped by a small shutting cupboard of which the panels were of looking-glass.

This, ladies (and cast a pitying glance at it, those of you who complain that your plate-glass topped dressing-table at home is “really not half *big* enough” to hold one’s three-panelled mirror, hand-glass, spread of brushes, combs, pots of cleansing cream, astringent, bottles of lotion, liquid white, one’s coloured glass powder bowls, one’s manicure set, one’s cut-glass scent things, one’s perfume-spray, and all the toilette appliances that, after all, one’s *got* to have!)—this, young ladies, was the one and only place that these four strolling players had amongst them as a toilet table, in front of which to make themselves up for the evening’s performance.

Yet not a stick of grease paint was to be seen, not a spill of powder. . . . The only manifestation of the craft was the big bottle of olive oil, the smaller bottle of eau-de-Cologne with which the make-up was taken off again, like Cinderella’s finery, at midnight.

“As for washing—being English,” said Nanette cheerfully, “Mélodie” (now a colleague, now “*thou*”) “will wish to precipitate herself, all, into cold water each day. Well, my dear, the sea is but five minutes away. A cheap *peignoir* is to be bought at the Bazaar. Pierrette will accompany thee into the village to show thee.”

III

"*Homeless, ragged and tanned, under the changing sky,*" hummed Melody, as Pierrette piloted her across the square. "Personally I've never been anywhere *more* of a real home! Steppy, the world's best housekeeper, couldn't run a show better. Besides, Nanette doesn't do it in that Martha-manner which sends you bolting out of any room, however well arranged, as soon as poor Steppy comes into it. If I pick up tips from Nanette I shall end as the Perfect Home Girl—"

On the way to the village, Pierrette asked, "Mélodie, are you affianced?"

"Not so foolish."

"You have not a Well-Beloved?"

"Lord, no!"

"But, admirers?"

Melody laughed into the serious, worshipful sixteen-year-old face, and answered, "That, perhaps!"

"Ah, we were sure. Many, Mélodie?"

"Only one, Pierrette."

(Did Keith's ears burn? Keith, playing deck quoits with Mrs. MacPherson, or acting dry nurse to the MacPherson babies? Keith with his heart set, and with every throb of that heart, every throb of the engines meaning so much nearer to Paris, to Melody, to another try for his golden girl.)

Melody's flapper friend, vicariously thrilled, went on asking questions.

"He's handsome, Mélodie?"

"Enough."

"Rich?"

"Not at all."

"He loves you much?"

"How do I know? He's so far away!" retorted Melody lightly. "He's in India now."

Talking, the girls had not noticed that a dark-clad, loosely-built man's figure had followed them at some paces' distance all the way down from the caravan's square.

But, as they came out of the Bazaar and passed the chairs and tables on the sloping pavement outside the Café Felix, a slender Artily-turned-out lounging figure raised his glass in smiling greeting to Pierrette; but it was not towards Pierrette that he turned that sideward glance.

Melody, with a thrill of renewed interest, asked, "Who is he, that man?"

CHAPTER XIII

INDISCREET WARNING

About one effect of having a lurid reputation; and about friends out of sight

I

By working harder than she had worked in her young life, Melody learnt against time half-a-dozen new rôles. Now these René, the tenor, imparted to the new-comer much as a sailor teaches a vocabulary to his parrot. Namely, by shutting himself up with her in the show-tent (sometimes with Madame Haynal, the pianist, to provide accompaniment) and by repeating her lines at her,

plugging her songs at her, going through her gestures, bullying, cajoling, sometimes despairing, sometimes encouraging, always temperamental, generally patient!—until at last his pupil emerged, blinking into the sunlight, exhausted, hungry, but word-perfect.

Melody, the joy-rider, took fresh delight in this life. Squalor and sequins, stage-talent and scullery-maid activities, rouge and wrinkles, pitiful “props,” make-shift scenery, costumes which seemed a practical joke on those who had to wear them (never in her career had Melody beheld tinsel so frayed, or so many miles of that cheap cotton-lace decking one production!), all seemed to her a continuous circus performance.

It was also so wildly off any beaten track known to her relatives or friends that Melody, in her letters, could scarcely begin to describe it to them. “All so dashed un-real” it would have sounded to Bill at home, or to Keith in India! Unreal? To Melody the Vagabond Show seemed more real than working in Paris or London; there was more of the breath of life in its colourful performances. She was conscious, here, of the presence of “something vivid” that had been left out of the routine at the Arabesque. What?

She thought it must be because she herself enjoyed playing to these heated, rowdy, enthusiastic audiences of visitors and fisher-folk who crowded up so close to the stage, that often the new principal felt as if she were acting in some rollicking game of charades. She thought it was because she, one of the chorus, and quite unfitted to be anything else (“*for the fact is,*” as she wrote off to the Clique, “*I’m engaged on my looks and clothes—don’t*

laugh!—and I shall never be anything approaching as good as the rest of the company. You remember Violet in our Glasgow pantomime, and how, because she was an old Tiller girl, she didn't know what to do with her two arms when they hadn't a Tiller girl's shoulder on each side to lean on? I feel just like her!"), enjoyed wrestling with a leading part. Grins of mischievous delight dimpled Melody's face, when, featured as the lovely Heiress in the "*Cloches de Corneville*," she would step forward to the centre of the stage, and (with gestures that seemed to dislocate first one hip and then the other, putting forward first the right, then the left elbow, pointing first the near, and then the off foot!) and lead the chorus to the tune of—

Regard'-moi ci,
Regard'-moi ça,
Comment trouvez vous cela?

until the clapping and "encores" rose to the flapping canvas roof.

To say nothing of "that exquisite modern Operetta, Miss Helyett," in which Melody, wearing the long-skirted uniform of a Salvation Army lassie, and with her hair dangling in a plait below her waist, took the part of the Parson's Daughter, who is forced by her father's principles to accept in marriage the first man who has caught sight of her leg above the ankle. The humour of this situation, being accepted as "*modern*," never appeared to strike the audience or the rest of the cast, but it appealed inordinately to Melody herself.

II

She took a delighted interest in her fellow artistes, who by day looked like tramps, but by night blossomed, Cereus-like, into Oriental princes, required duchesses, dashing bull-fighters. Some of the twenty were here because they had come down in the world, like old Monsieur Toussaint, the comic, who smelt so horribly of brandy, but who had played parts in Paris. Others were here because they had come up in the world from the Sailors Bar. All were new types to Melody, from the Baritone, her stage-lover (who was the stout pianist's actual husband), to the Platt daughter-in-law, the contralto, who begged leave to borrow Melody's yellow silk pyjamas ("*only to take the pattern!*"), and who, at that night's performance of *The Grand Mogul*, appeared in those pyjamas, hung with beads and transformed into her costume as the Oriental Princess.

But the fellow-artiste whom Melody found most of all intriguing and—yes!—most of all "vivid," was the comic actor's son, André Toussaint.

III

Now this was a young man of gifts. He had been sent to study painting in the Atelier Colarossi; for two or three years he had lived the life of the Paris studios. . . . Then misfortune had fallen upon his parents; black misery! Drink, of course. . . . His mother was the most pathetic figure of the chorus, a depressed, withered soprano, who hobbled about the stage with an unconcealed limp. And why? Because of having been run down by a

motor-car near the Odéon, and lying three months in hospital.

When she came out it was to find her home had been sold up. (*"That's your stage life, so gay,"* commented Nanette, with a glance at the untroubled faces of her daughters.) After which both Toussaints, always considering themselves dizzily superior, had joined the troupe, bringing with them their son. To him had been given the imbecile waiter in *"The Mountebanks,"* with other small parts, but his star rôle was that of the Apache in the melodrama *"The Two Little Vagabonds."* Dark, hatchet-faced, feline, he gave a minute-and-a-half's performance in pantomime that got the house shuddering. He only had to shoot a sideward glance from under his cap, to slouch behind his victim and wait, a tiger before the spring. Then, noiselessly, swiftly, to unknot the blood-red scarf from about his throat, pausing again . . . to spring! Off, that scarf!—whipped as a gag over his victim's mouth! . . . It was a finished performance, that of Toussaint *fils*. His was the slinky, dark-jerseyed figure in the peaked cap with the red carnation, who, on her first afternoon in La Falaise, had caught Melody's eye.

The discerning reader realizes that this, and not Orville K. Kent, was the dark young man who was fated in some way to be dangerous to Melody Wynne.

IV

Those two had been aware of each other, really, since that first look in the Square. . . . The second occasion that brought them at all near was, of all things!—a funeral.

There had died in the village a very aged fisherman, the patriarch of one of those half-dozen huge fishing-families that make up the Falaise population; and, according to custom, a messenger had been sent round to every house, intoning solemnly into every door-way the invitation to the obsequies. . . . ("You are invited to the interment of Jean-Marie Gournay on Monday at a quarter to ten.")

"It is impressive, the interment of these fisher-folk. We must watch," Madame Nanette told Melody, who let herself be borne off by the Rénés to the street of mourning. She hadn't wished to go, this girl who felt her life so vibrantly in every limb! Yet she was glad she did go. For never, short of an Armistice Service and the Two Minutes' Silence, had she encountered such true reverence, dignity, and impressiveness of ceremonial.

Every woman of the village wore black; wore "costume"—either the velvety chenille headdress like an anti-macassar, worn mantilla-wise, and so black it made the other blacks look grey, the Mrs. Noah bodice of that district, the full apron and skirt . . . or, if older, the huge, nun-like, bell-shaped skirt with hood over the white cap and diamond-shaped silver clasps at the throat. Every man was in a black suit and cap. All, Melody noticed, had crammed sun-burnt, toil-worn hands into black cotton gloves. The tiny, narrow, cobbled street (with a glimpse at one end of village-green and sky, at the other end of sloping red roofs and church-spire) looked as though a stream of tar had suddenly been poured down it.

In front of one door waited two horses and the hearse.

The horses wore plumes (rather shabby) and black-and-silver draperies. On the box sat a solemn, fair young man, not unlike Velásquez's Philip the Fourth, who whilst waiting wore a grey cap and smoked a cigarette, but, whilst preparations were made inside the house, took off that cap and assumed a silver-laced cocked-hat.

The strolling players watched in a silent group.

Presently Nanette whispered, "The Priest." . . . He came down the street with four attendants and four little choir-boys. Then all the Rénés crossed themselves devoutly, as from the house the coffin was brought out and pushed into place.

The hearse started; and there appeared the only splash of colour in the length of that street—a big wreath, on the back of the carriage, made of greenery with pink and yellow flowers.

Silently the long procession formed, headed by men, more men, more fishermen. . . .

Then out of the fisher's house appeared, with carven faces, the women; his daughters, his grand-daughters, his youngest grand-daughter weeping bitterly. All fell in and followed in profoundest silence. . . .

Then, as the procession disappeared, there came from the back of the house a sound of loud and angry wailing. . . .

"The baby!" exclaimed Nanette, at once making a dive into that doorway, for she had already visited that house for the lying-in-state and had made the acquaintance of Marie-Thérèse, the seven-months-old baby, great-grand-daughter of the old man. Marie-Thérèse had been awake since six that morning, had been left alone with a strange

washing-up woman from another village, and was manifesting her violent disapproval of the whole proceedings. . . . Abruptly the noise ceased.

Nanette, without a word, had caught the crying baby out of her basket, to soothe her upon a breast formed for such offices. She emerged, carrying Marie-Thérèse Gournay, already fallen into profound slumber, and someone who had come up to stand on the kerb beside Melody while the procession passed, exclaimed, dramatically, "From the house of Death. Life goes on; that's Life!"

Melody turned. It was André Toussaint, hatless and serious-faced, who had offered this comment to Nanette. But the Rénés (who intended to keep the baby in their van whilst the *maman* was at the interment, since it was not to a person of the disposition of that washing-up woman, who herself said she lacked the patience for babies! that one abandoned an infant) remained apparently unimpressed.

Melody, however, in touched and sobered mood, gave a nod of understanding—not to the young man who had sheathed his sharp, black eyes and softened the thin red line of his lips as he spoke, but to his phrase.

"Life goes on; that's Life! He sums it up. He's sympathetic. Intelligent. He," she thought, "would be the most interesting of any of them if one got him to talk—"

But, actually, the first time they exchanged more than the passing greeting of two who work in the same company, happened on a Friday morning early, during the La Falaise market—a scene in contrast from that silent, sombre procession of mourners.

Melody, with a commission of Nanette's, came out of the van into a market square so populous, that the activities of the theatre at its upper end appeared to be swallowed up. Crowds mingled and moved between rows of market stalls. Of these stalls, some were deal tables under awnings, others a pitch upon the bare earth, upon which women, who had driven miles in carts that morning, had spread trophies of vegetables, baskets of fowls, boxes with living rabbits, tin pails holding market-bunches of dahlias, asters, zinnias, marigolds, gaudy as the print or tricot garments of the French visitors, gay as their chintz marketing-bags! What colour, what a noise, what a massed effect of vivacity, purpose, squatness, brunette obesity, vitality! "Beside this crowd, an English one would look all half-alive! Always as if we were just coming out of some hypnotic trance! Is it better to have long, shapely limbs and that hopelessly apathetic Anglo-Saxon gape? Or to have a French face like a condensed music-hall programme, with legs like old-fashioned piano-ones, ending in pig's trotters?" Melody wondered. She was assailed by sound; a buzz of haggling, plaintive wails of "Fish, fish! Oh, the fresh mackerel! Oh, the fine fresh mackerel!" and the deep bass of a fruit-seller shouting zestfully, "Ah, the grapes! Oh, lá, lá, the lovely grapes!"

Behind her a man's voice in her ear murmured persuasively, "Good morning, Mademoiselle Mélodie; you find it amusing, the market?"

Melody jumped a little. She had not noticed sidling up to her through the crowd, that slinky, dark-jerseyed form of André Toussaint, with, in his cap, Democracy's

red flower. He smiled at her with sharp, black eyes, thin scarlet lips.

Fresh colour seemed to flow into an already gaudy scene; for certain men, certain women, have only to appear and to create that Illusion. . . .

Melody returned this young man's good-day. (What was to tell her that it was to be such a significant day, a day to be marked with a white stone, or with a red flower in her life?) She admitted that the market was amusing, asked him to advise her as to the stalls where one bought vegetables. It was a cauliflower to cook for mid-day.

"Let us inspect all the stalls?" he suggested blithely, good-humouredly—and yet, with a dash of condescension, not towards Melody, but towards the market. She must understand that he was a Parisian, accustomed to quite different *milieus*. "A cauliflower? Don't you find they are decorative? So enormous, so rounded, so white, so like clouds voluptuously painted on the Versailles ceilings where little Cupids play? You will let me carry that shopping-bag for the cauliflower, Mademoiselle Mélodie?"

Melody allowed him, and all the more readily because she was expecting that, from their caravan-window, the René's might catch sight of her talking to this young man against whom they had already, if you please, warned her!

V

"That fellow," René had declared roundly, "is bad all through. Daily he makes his mother weep. Dark histories—"

"Do tell me what they are," Melody had implored.

This had been over a cramped, but cheery, mid-day meal at the fold-up caravan-table, with Melody, the tenor, his wife, and their daughters, feasting in an atmosphere of domesticity mingled with bohemian camaraderie.

"Dark histories of André Toussaint. In the last town we played— Thou rememberest, Nanette!" (But Nanette, in housewife's uniform of check overall and a dusting-cap over eight metal curlers, had been on her knees, worshipping at the cooking-stove.) "Was there not a married lady, there for the holidays with her two little boys, who went mad about this fellow?"

"And she was old, old," put in Pierrette. "Thirty-six!"

"But elegant," cried Pierrette. "Even with a car!"

"Every morning she called for him in the car! taking him for the déjeuner to her hotel. Or, if monsieur had his bad temper and refused, the lady herself ate with his family in the van. She could not leave the fellow!"

"Every night," little Pierrette had enlarged, "she came to the show to see him play."

"Every Saturday," René had continued, "arrived from Paris her husband, a monsieur completely distinguished."

"We saw him at the show, sitting by his wife. Evidently he preferred to see nothing, while Madame had no eyes but for young Toussaint. She wept like a source, the day the company had to move here, and she had to motor back to Paris. She writes to him now from Paris; vows she will find him some situation there. One would say he was a magnetizer of women! And why? He is not good looking, he is not gifted, he plays nothing well but the Apache, which is him by nature. As for his

voice," the tenor had declared, "it exists not. Yet, the same in every town he has ever played. He attracts, he pleases, he makes histories. When not one of the visitors, then the daughter of the estaminet, the young wife of the butchery. Dost thou not remember, Nanette, when—"

"Eat, eat!" Nanette had interrupted, dumping potatoes on her husband's plate. "Pierrette, those glasses. Mariette, one cleans the knife gently on the bit of bread. Eat, Melody. It is good, the rabbit?"

And the Apache scandals had been dropped, until privately Nanette could rebuke her husband's indiscretion.

"I, indiscreet? *I?*"

"It is not by proclaiming that a young man is a bad lot," Nanette had pointed out, "that one makes him uninteresting in the eyes of a young girl."

VI

Already interested and amused, Melody Wynne was now threading her way between market stalls at the side of the Apache; he swinging the shopping bag that Nanette had thrust into her hands. A dangerous young man really . . . But what possibility of danger could there be in this French rapsallion out of a fit-up company, for the daughter of an old Regular Army English officer, decently bred, gently nurtured, and used to "nice" men who were her brother's friends? No English person noticing the picturesquely contrasted couple in that market crowd would have allowed for dangerous possibilities. Heavens! the girl for a lark might have let herself in for a few weeks with a crazy French circus; for the time being she

would swallow her circumstances whole, but when she came away it would have no more effect upon her life than having looked at the film posters on the walls of a cinema. "Melody," as Colonel Wynne declared, "would come through all right. She knew what was what, and that . . ."

That would be the English view.

The French have such incurably obsolete ideas about the effect of these dark, intelligent, out-to-please, highly vitalized young men on these blonde, creamy, sleeping-beauty-like maidens.

Slowly the pair passed through the stalls, under the sunshine.

"Silk stockings, Mademoiselle? Beautiful stockings?" coaxed a stall holder at her elbow. "Thirty francs only."

Melody had worn no stockings, except on the stage, since she came to La Falaise. Usually she could have told you she had a hawk's eye for stockings good and cheap. She missed a bargain, listening to the low-pitched voice of the Apache, telling her how early this morning he had looked out of his caravan window, had beheld Mademoiselle going down the street to the beach.

"It was good, the water?"

"Not very," said Melody. "The tide was in almost to the sea wall. I like it better when one can run on the sands after the swim."

"I," the Apache said with a shrug, "do not care much for bathing in this place. The bay is too small; one would say a small dish full, full, full of coloured shrimps, shrimps who hop, who try to swim, who pull the rope, who throw the ball, who scream. And always that fool of a

guardian who blows the horn if one ventures to swim a yard beyond the boat. Better bathing is at Hardelot. You were never there, Mademoiselle Mélodie? A charming walk. One takes the cliff path, past the lighthouse, past the overturned boats of Equihen where the fishers live, then down on to the beautiful sands!"

Melody thought: "I do like him. I don't see him as such a *shiek*? He can't help those idiotic married ladies ('Folks, you've heard of these scandalous vamps?'). I think he's just a decent, breezy, friendly soul."

"Ah, the lovely grapes!" bellowed that fruit seller.

They had made the tour of the whole square, and the Apache told Melody that this afternoon he meant to take that walk to Hardelot, to drink a coffee, to return, taking the Equihen bus which would bring him back to La Falaise in time for the evening show. An agreeable walk. Above all, if one could find agreeable company!

"But among the comrades here there are not any very sportive," murmured the Apache confidentially, "who would spend an afternoon joyously in the open air, in the English fashion!" His dark appealing glance slid sideways under peaked cap and carnation. He could not take the liberty of asking Mademoiselle to consent to come with him, but—"

"Why not?" thought Melody Wynne. She suddenly longed for a tramp over the sands, away from the Rénés and everyone. She had been living in gangs. How long was it since she had had an afternoon in the company of one congenial person, all to herself? Absurd not to take what came in that line, perfectly cheerily. This man, of course, was French; and Melody knew enough

to know that Frenchmen are not supposed to invite young French girls out for the afternoon, except for what is considered the characteristically French purpose of making love. She knew that to be seen out alone with a man is still enough to blast the reputation of the well-brought-up French girl.

But surely stage people are another matter, all the world over?

"Besides, I can take care of myself," thought she (as all girls think, as the fiancées of Bluebeard thought, as 'thought the sultanas before Scheherazade, and many more!), "even if he did not know I were English, which he does. He specially said that about 'the English fashion' to let me know that he understood English people are different. . . . So why shouldn't I?"

"When do you start?"

"At three o'clock, Mademoiselle— Oh, Mademoiselle, this is an honour. At three o'clock it will be cool enough." The same gesture bared and bowed the dark head of the Apache before he swung off to the right. "To the pleasure of seeing you again!"

VII

When Melody got back to the Rénés' caravan, Nanette, clutching in one hand the flat iron, and in the other a grey-blue envelope, cried, "Mademoiselle is returned at last? See. The facteur came with this letter for Mees, while thou wast seeking the cauliflower. By the way, where is it, this cauliflower?"

"Damn!" murmured Melody. "Sapristi!"

One does not say these words, as Nanette could have

told her. But then, she had forgotten to buy that cauliflower.

Odd, this spell of forgetfulness that seemed to have been laid upon Melody. She also forgot to tell the Rénés about the projected expedition to Hardelet with the young man of whom they disapproved. Nanette would have had a word to say to this plan, but Nanette was preoccupied. At last night's performance of "The Musketeers in the Convent" she had caught her Lady Abbess's robe on a nail; there was a bad tear to be darned, and the tenor's wife put more art into mending costumes than into interpreting any rôle—though her rendering of lines was so dependable that it reminded Melody of the triangle-playing ("*Ting, ting!*") by those carven ladies decorating the Clichy giddy-go-round with pouter-pigeon figures rather like Nanette's own. Nanette was also worried because her tiny black kitten, usually to be found curled up like a caterpillar on her red eiderdown, had since last night been missing. "Doubtless stolen! None of the others have seen it," fretted Nanette. "Mélodie, when didst thou last notice it, our little cat?"

Melody could not remember. Melody, all absent-minded, now forgot something of which the child Mariette reminded her. "Thy letter! Thou hast not opened it. Is it from the Monsieur who is far away?"

"Which Monsieur?"

Poor, forgotten Keith Cartwright . . .

They had left the ship and Keith at that moment was in France. He sat in the Paris-bound train, and, over the head of the youngest Master MacPherson on his knee,

watched the train smoke trailing a scarf that showed rifts here and there . . . golden vineyards . . . palms. There were still hours to wait before golden country should fade, giving place to grey-roofed city. Hours before Paris . . . Still every jolt of the train drew him nearer to the place where as he fondly imagined he was to meet his Melody.

VIII

His Melody was then saying, "Oh, no, my letter is not from India. It's from the Clique—my friends at the Music Hall."

A bunch of sheets began with the handwriting of Anne, who said it was adorable hearing from Melody, it seemed such years since they were all happy together at the Arabesque. "Everything is rotten now," Anne scrawled, "of course you know all is over between Teddy and I." ("I" crossed out, "me" written and crossed out, "I" finally substituted.) "Men are all alike. Melody, you be warned by my experience, and realize that dark or fair they are not worth a thought."

Sybil went on "What do you think? Arabesque has sprung a present, don't laugh, for everyone of her Company; an enormous photograph of herself written on separately. The Earwaker brought ours all round to the dressing-rooms, serving them out like tracts, '*To Sybil with love from Arabesque,*' etc., and what do you think we did: We four stood up together and at the word go tore our photographs across and across and chucked them into the waste paper basket. We didn't care what happened, but nothing did.—Love from Syb."

Next came—"Dear old Mel.,—hoping you are in the pink as this leaves me—Ginger."

Continued by Mamie, who hoped Melody was all right, as the song said where her caravan had rested, however she could prefer a travelling show to going back to her beautiful home, Mamie couldn't think.

"Still, you're so young, Melody. It's after thirty the time comes when a girl realizes there's nothing like home and hubby. As for Hanne, the girl is dotty, flying right up in the air about Teddy when she ought to consider herself in luck getting such a boy, and his people quite ready to help them and all. The show continues to go, and I should think would do for the next three years, so will now close with love and kisses; be good.—Mamie."

"P.S.—Darling, take no notice of the beginning of this letter. Since writing it all is well between Teddy and I. He has been perfectly sweet, and it was my fault, and he has got me the divinest ring from Cartier's, diamond and sapphire. I wish you could see it. From your marvelously happy friend, Anne le Mesurier."

Yesterday the girls' gossip would have been devoured by a sympathetic Melody. To-day she felt as if she had forgotten what her Clique looked like. All far away, muzzy, vague. To-day was vivid! To-day's bright sunshine and blue sky with cauliflower clouds rollicking across it, with little waves drawing white lines on the Channel, with a sea breeze stirring the turf and sea pinks of the cliffs! To-day Melody was not amused by memories; she was only amused by the prospect of a tramp along the sunlit cliffs with her new friend the Apache.

As she slipped on a crisp print frock which she had ac-

tually found to fit her at Barker's, for twelve-and-eleven, laced her newly-whitened espadrilles above her bare peach-tanned ankles, ran a comb through her flattened gold front hair, and tightened the hairpins in her bun at the back, she felt all in the vein for fresh air and exercise. Light-heartedly she ran down the step-ladder from her van. She looked about; no one seemed to see her go.

All four of the Rénés were seeking for that lost kitten when Melody and the Apache set out from the square.

CHAPTER XIV

ESCAPADE

About what happened in a light-house; and about plans for the future

I

"You like walking, Mademoiselle Mélodie?"

"I adore walking, Monsieur Toussaint."

"After the eternal vans, one is glad to distract oneself a little in the free air. There is a fine view from here."

"The view is superb."

"If you look down there—where I point, Mademoiselle, above the end of the jetty a little to the right, you will observe something like a piece of thin white cord with knots on it, laid down upon the horizon. It is the coast of England, your country. To see it from here is, they say, a sign of coming storm."

This was the impersonal, prim, even stilted note on which began the conversation of the walk.

White-and-gold Melody swung ahead by a stride or so

of the tall, dark-clad, gracefully loping man's shape. The narrow, up-and-down path they followed skirted the cliff edge, sometimes only half a yard from the drop down to the Channel waves forty feet below, sometimes looping inland toward the fields. It came to a bright oasis, sunny turf, white-washed walls brilliant in the sunshine, a white-washed, white-roofed house standing in a wind-nipped garden, a white flagstaff, a tall white-washed lighthouse. And, amidst all this sunlit brilliance, a personified Gloom . . . darkly morose, the man reclined close to the path. A pair of binoculars was loose in his hand; he stared with gloomy eyes over the blue abyss of sky and Channel, divided by that which looked like a line of thin white knotted cord, the distant English coast. He stared; at what? That coast? Those nearer boats below? Those planing seagulls? That heaving sheet of aquamarine patched by those blots of indigo which were covered rocks, patterned by those silver ribbons which were currents? He gave the effect of seeing none of these things. At what then was he staring with those haunted eyes? The shadows of the two passed over him, and he half turned. Melody gave him a pleasant good day. How glum the face he raised to her, how surly his grunted response!

"You saw that fellow there, the lighthouse-keeper?" said the Apache, about fifty yards further on. "You know his story, Mademoiselle? No? He used to live there in that house by the flagstaff with his wife and with another lighthouse-keeper, his friend. Now he lives there alone."

"Why? Where are the—"

"The other man? The woman? Dead. The light-house-keeper shot them."

"What?"

"As I tell you. One night he found his wife and his friend making love. He killed them then and there, both."

"Good heavens!" Quickly Melody turned her burnished head to glance back at the dark blot, small on the face of the sunny cliff. So that man there, dangling the binoculars, glooming out across the Channel, grunting in response to a friendly "Bonjour," was a *murderer*? "But he still keeps the lighthouse, he still lives there; he got off?"

"Naturally. Mademoiselle did not expect that a French jury would condemn to death a man who, having found himself betrayed, killed for love?"

"Love?" protested Melody with her stare. The look on her peach face startled and deepened by this story which the Apache had told in a voice well adapted to get it across. "One can't call that exactly love."

"No?" The low-pitched, curiously fascinating voice of the young Frenchman took up. "The English conception of love is different, one hears, from our own. But Mademoiselle, I believe, is partly French?"

From this point on the conversation became personal.

II

By the time they reached the fishing hamlet of Equihen, and made their way down the rocky path to the long stretch of blonde sands, the Apache knew more of Melody's character and life than ever she told him.

But it was he who talked. About his rich relations in Marseilles, who did not give a sou for those of their blood with the artistic temperament (himself). About the glories of old Monsieur Toussaint's career. "Ah! if my father had had strength of will, there is nothing he could not have accomplished. Guitry, Max Dearly—what is his humour compared with that of Papa in his good days?" But against catastrophe after catastrophe, Papa could not struggle. He sank. Tragically he had dragged down with him Madame Toussaint, that poor cherished *maman*.

Here Melody remembered René's comment on André Toussaint, "Daily he makes his mother weep!" Surely untrue; the Apache was obviously devoted to the parents he had followed in misfortune. As for the young man's blighted ambitions of becoming a portrait painter, it was tragic. And by the time the couple had reached the wrecked submarine, half-embedded in the sandy pool, André Toussaint had ventured, "Must it be still the ceremonious Monsieur? Since one is comrades in the *métier*, Mélodie, you will call me by my little name? With those worthy Rénés, I remark, it is thee and thou!"

A hundred yards further on he asked: "And when it is over, Mélodie, this tour, what are your plans? To forget this escapade of the Travelling Theatre? To return to England?"

"No," Melody told him.

She told him what she had not meant to tell anyone yet. Namely, that when the company broke up she was not returning to London. René and Nanette, who with

their daughters, were going to make the Riviera towns in an act, had suggested Mélodie's coming too. They had a friend who worked with casino managers, and who was getting together several choruses of girls. There would be possibilities of an opening for an English dancer—

"Luck!" exclaimed the Apache, as if honestly surprised, enchanted. "I, too, this winter shall probably work the South of France."

"Good!" said Melody, and thought, "Then it was just ill-natured gossip about his taking a job to be near his married lady in Paris?"

III

In Paris, at that moment, his married lady, that feverish *amoureuse* of thirty-six, who was the wife of a well-to-do manufacturer, sat down at the new expensive *écritoire* of a salon in the Primavera style and wrote, in blue ink on thick mauve note-paper, this note:

"My adored André!

Apropos of that position in the factory which I have promised to thee and to myself. This I have now arranged. Thou mayest expect to hear very shortly from my husband. In three weeks, Beloved, we shall be again in each other's arms!"

At that moment, also in Paris, another woman was writing to the Apache. A woman? It was a frail girl of eighteen who sat up against hospital-pillows, no whiter than her face, took pad and pencil from the good sister's hand and scribbled:

"My little André *chéri!*—Hast thou quite forgotten thy little one, who is so unhappy? But all is forgiven now. I know thou didst not with intent ill-treat me. A word from thee, and I should quickly grow well. I live only for the time when we are together again, and I posing once more for thee to paint. Surely it is not always necessary to keep our love a secret? Write, I beseech thee, to her who is thine for life, thy little wife—AIMEE.

"I must send this letter to the friend of Papa-in-law, who last gave me news of thee, since I do not even know where to find thee in this moment."

IV

At that moment Keith Cartwright, in a Paris-bound express, handed the sleeping Master MacPherson back into his mother's arms. Then turning his eyes from the rushing landscape, of which he saw nothing but Melody's dream face, he picked up a magazine in which he read nothing but the phrases of his own impatient longing. "As soon as I see her I shall know where I stand. . . . Scraps of letters from her haven't told one a thing. Except, of course, that she was still keener on the life than on any of the people she met. There doesn't seem to be another man in the offing. I wonder what she's doing? . . ."

V

At that moment, swinging over the sands with the salt breeze in their faces, Melody and her friend the Apache talked of plans for the forth-coming winter. In the Midi was always sunshine; always (fibbed the Apache)! He

sketched for Melody vague glittering pictures of life in the Riviera towns; he made it a frieze of gala-nights at the Casino—spectacles, dancings, competitions, mimosa-fêtes; delightful, enthusiastic, cosmopolitan audiences; sun-bathing in January! “*On s’amuse bien, vous savez!*” Trips out to the Islands. . . . Luck that they were not to lose sight of each other at this engagement’s end!—“Luck” agreed Melody, pleased enough, and told herself that in this Toussaint lad she had won an entirely new brand of pal. . . . Incredibly, she was capable of this obtuseness!

She would not have admitted that this was what the Clique called “getting off with” or “falling for.” No, it was something less ordinary. If she had not been an English girl, perhaps he might have tried another manner. As it was—well! Evidently young Toussaint understood this “difference” of the English. (On which the English always do build.) This “something vivid” which Melody vaguely missed in life, and which family had not supplied, nor her Clique, nor the theatre in Paris—it seemed it began to make itself felt in the society of this picturesque, entertaining creature, half-actor, half-artist, and completely Bohemian. Yes, as her English friends would have said, Melody was used to the society of “nice” men whom her brothers would not hesitate to bring home, but many a girl has been driven to yearn for the society of men whom her brothers would not hesitate to kick out of the house. Melody thought, “This man would certainly jar on Daddy. . . . Somehow I don’t mind that ‘jarring’; it makes him more interesting. It’s like the discords in some of that modern music. At first it shocks

and then it pleases you." Two months ago it would have pleased Melody less, but in these eight or nine weeks she had been altering, developing, growing new facets of personality, becoming ever more vaguely conscious of waiting for Life to bring her more. Keith's good-bye—that promise of laughing Spring in her blood! Keith's letters; a sudden white-frost. Melody had felt the cold, had suffered, scarcely knowing . . . refusing to know. And this was the moment of her career when she must needs encounter this unclassified André Toussaint of the quick, measuring black eyes, of the craftily thin scarlet lips—whom she summed up as "perfectly decent, only just not-English. . . ."

"But, apart from being a painter, if you were not of the *métier*," she said to him, "what would you most wish to— Heavens!" she broke off, "what's this?"

Towards them on the sands there rushed a Shape on white wings; half bird, half sailing boat, it sped towards them, passed them, pursued by a second skimming Shape that crowded on speed with wings and wheels.

"Aerophage!" cried the Apache, pulling up to gaze after these winged sledges which were already small as gulls on the way to Equihen. "Beach-racing. Lucky fellows who can afford to offer themselves the sport!" His mobile face twisted into lines of resentment; it was suddenly ugly—the face of a man who wishes harm to those luckier than he, and who could himself bring that harm upon them. Startling, Melody thought; I wish I hadn't seen him look like that. It's his face of the play. . . . But immediately the lurking violence vanished; he smiled at her again, explaining to her, as they walked, the

technique of that sport; telling her of rich Englishmen, chic Frenchmen, who came to Hardelot because of the uninterrupted miles of parquet-smooth sand for the aerophage-run.

"You asked me just now what I should wish? Ah, but to be rich enough to own such toys. Not like the aeroplane where everything is machinery and one is stunned by engine-noise. Here is no power but the gale; the sailor is one with the wind. Romantic! Imagine the ecstasy of flying thus; but far! far from the *métier*, the vans, the jealous comrades, the women—that is, the people who pester, scold, and weep. To escape! That calls me, *Mélo*die; to take wing and nevermore return to earth!"

"I love the way he *puts* things," thought Melody as they reached the half-finished esplanade and handful of card-castle villas which is Hardelot.

VI

In the lounge of its Grand Hotel, visitors glanced at that tea-table in the corner, that oddly-assorted couple; the Girl, so tall, lissom, peachily fair—a darling! with something about her that reminded one of buttercup meadows, the silver Thames, the roses that cascade over the wall of Phyllis Court to kiss their own reflection in the water; the Man, so darkly Continental, turned out in fisherman's togs and an Augustus John hat; and so quite preposterously the artist.

"Actors," muttered an English Undergraduate, sitting in another corner with his party. "I've seen those people before. They were in a priceless show we saw at La Falaise. The girl I thought was English."

VII

Melody, when the waiter brought the bill, blithely protested that *thé complet*, like the walk, should be *en camarade*, she paying her share. After all, thirty francs. . . .

The Apache, with one hand put aside this idea, with the other dragging from inside his jersey a folded fifty-franc note. Perhaps Melody would not have given way with so good a grace had she guessed that the note represented more than half the weekly salary of Toussaint's cherished *maman* (who was probably at that moment indulging in her daily weep).

It was the suggestion of the Apache that they should, before returning to Equihen, ramble further along the beach to explore.

"Why not?" said Melody Wynne.

For miles the beach stretches on, to the right the glittering Channel, to the left, separating plage from fir forests, the girdle of the sandhills, thicketed with low-growing privet. Undulating chains of dunes rose to heights up which they clambered (she laughingly refusing his hand), dipping to nest-like craters that sheltered them from the breeze. The blue of towering skies ripened to amber and rose (but Melody had not realized that danger signal, forgetting the time!) when the Apache and she found the nest screened by sandy walls, where they settled themselves down for a rest before setting their faces homewards.

Without further ado the young Frenchman (as might have been expected) began to make love to her.

CHAPTER XV

ARRIVAL

*About a journey that did not end
in lovers' meeting; and about
artificial versus real romance*

I

IN Paris that same afternoon the train from the South drew into the big railway station; and down out of that train climbed, amongst many others, one young Englishman, arrestingly tall, strikingly sunburnt, having Eastern labels on his luggage and a kit-bag stamped K. Cartwright.

Up about him surged the mob of smaller agitated blue-bloused figures. "Porteur?" "Porteur?"—

Even while he gave them orders about taxis and baggage for himself and little Mrs. MacPherson with the baby MacPhersons of whom he now at last took leave, Keith in his heart was exulting. "Journeys end in lovers' meeting. I'm going to jolly well see it does! I shan't let that infernal brick wall of inhibitions stand between us again. Got to shove it down somehow, barge over it, take my girl in my arms—*Chauffeur: To the Hotel Beaujolais, rue Beaujolais!*—I did, once, after all. The mistake I made was not going on. I know now. I may have got the idea late, but I've got it. When I see Melody I'll just snatch her out of that theatre-crowd, get her to myself somewhere and tell her what I mean. Can't do anything with letters. *Now*, I can make love to her all out—whew! all but a crash into that Voisin. Lord, what a pace they go at here. Still, that's the spirit I like to see, at the moment . . . Gad, how stuffy Paris is; how deafeningly

noisy, what wild clothes the men wear, and how bilious they all look. Ghastly place it must be to live in," Keith summed up this City of the World's Delight. "Topping place to get out of."

It was, as he knew, a *matinée* day at the Arabesque. Good! A piece of luck. When he saw Melody—

"One arrives," hinted the driver, halting before a stately façade in a street like a corridor. Keith dumped his luggage at the hotel. He precipitated himself into a hot bath; he shaved. He changed out of his travelling tweeds into a suit that looked for all the world as if the trousers of it had been cut by one exclusive tailor, the jacket by another, while the waistcoat thereof had been achieved by a third artist—though none of this was true; that grey flannel suit being, actually, a cheap enough effort by the same modest man always employed by the Cartwrights, and its apparent excellence being due, as you have already been told, to the Cartwright figure.

With a triumphant click, he closed behind him the door of his bedroom. Such a bedroom, by the way! Such a mixture of ancient French glories, economy, and the exactions of *le confort moderne*! Its windows were blocked by a row of pots with geraniums so dusty that you would long to water them if only with pitying tears; but its panelled walls were a masterpiece of gilding, ornate and beautiful. Its mantelpiece and mirror were looped with carven rose-garlands, upheld by Cupids, by rounded Girl-caryatids. Crimson brocade, with tassels, draped its bed which was wide and low and set on lions' feet, while far above this couch for Royal lovers the ceiling spread

its stately patterns, cut abruptly in half where the wall met the bedside. Large as it was, the room had been bisected; and it was easy to guess how long before it was an hotel the Beaujolais had known spacious days as a palace.

Shining and groomed, Keith came forth like a bridegroom rejoicing from that chamber. He swung into that little grey corridor with the bump in the middle, which is the rue Beaujolais, he strode across the gardens of the Palais Royal, seeing them not, nor their fountain, nor their arcades; he reached the glittering rue de Rivoli, leapt into another taxi, and, all joyous suspense, was rattled up the famous cobbled hill to the Music Hall Arabesque.

II

In that ornate vestibule, plastered with portraits of the *grande Arabesque* (and once the scene of a telling-off of Arabesque by one of her chorus!) he found the box office; in the box office a smiling and piquante brunette.

She opened wide black eyes upon this English milord (so distinguished! So chic! Of such a handsome silhouette, my faith!) who arrived as though having just won an automobile race, to demand a fauteuil in the front row.

"Certainly, Monsieur. But for this evening?—not for this afternoon?"

"Why not? Isn't there a *matinée*?" demanded the young milord, his fair face falling.

"But, certainly, Monsieur, there is a *matinée* to-day. Or rather, there was a *matinée*. It is just nearly over," the French girl told him. "Finished, the Performing Co-

bras! Finished, that so-pretty Crinoline Dance! Over, the Dwarf Acrobats' Act! Listen, Monsieur, justly the music of the last number which begins—"

And faintly through the doors came the lilt of a tune which had already drifted from America to Europe, and over Europe to Asia, a tune which Keith had heard hummed and wirelessly and gramophoned on the homeward-bound steamer.

"Hawaiian Moonlight!"—

"I know. *San fairy ann*," said young Keith. (Actually, he pronounced on these lines the useful old phrase; languages were not his strong point.) Pleasantly, a little breathlessly, he explained that even the end of the show, he must see it. He had a friend on the stage!

"Ah, in effect!" exclaimed the box office brunette, beaming interest at this romance. "Milord was here to see one of the stars!"

"No! One of the chorus," exulted Keith gaily. Grabbing his ticket, throwing down notes without waiting for change, he legged it off through the doors to find the black gowned *ouvreuse* hovering like a crow at his elbow.

"This way, Monsieur le Duc," whispered the crow.

He followed her down a corridor that cut that vast crowded cavern of the Arabesque, all gloom but for the huge blinding oblong of the stage.

III

Keith, insinuating his graceful bulk into the one empty stall, with an American gentleman in tortoiseshell glasses to his right, an Argentine lady with a heavy black moustache to his left, blinked, at first dazzled by the set, which

was drenched in calcium moonlight. Starry sky, glittering sea, an island beach with rocks and tropic foliage. Centre stage, a short woman wearing incandescent beads and a waving headdress made of an entire young palm-tree was posturing in would-be savage poses.

This, if Keith had paused to consider, was the *grande Arabesque*. Much he cared! It was someone else in search of whom his young, dazzled eyes raked the stage. Staring . . . Searching . . .

Behind that central figure, in a pattern, forty fringed kilts swung rhythmically above eighty shapely limbs, of comely young faces, forty smiled like one, to the music of the revue's most sugary chorus. The Johnson-Brown Girls were crooning—Arabesque's great song hit—

“Ha-waii-an Moonlight!
Ha-waii-an, Hawaiian Moon!
'Neath silv'ry June light
I'll see you soon—”

The whole house sat back and revelled in the vehemently coloured, highly sweetened, artificial Romance. True romance transformed the world for Keith Cartwright. If he could only see . . . These rows of girls' faces looked like rows of pink bon-bons in a box . . . yet he ought to be able to spot Melody directly. She would be in the front row, just above him. Had she not sent him the picture-postcard of this same number (“*Hawaiian Moonlight*”) with a cross marking the dancer second from the left, meaning “*That's me!*”?

Her, after all these weeks and weeks, he would now see again in the flesh; her honey-blondeness, her goddess-

limbs. Imagine it! In painful excitement his heart throbbed. In unison the orchestra throbbed, throbbed, and crooned. Oh, girl, girl . . .

On the stage, the tall dancing-girl, front row second from the left, swung high, swung low, swung right, swung left, joined her true young voice mechanically enough to the chorus of that tune which Keith had already heard on the boat until he was sick of the thing—

“I’ll see you soon!
And croon a tune
Upon my uku-uku-ukulele!
Hawaii—Hawaiian Moon!”

The calcium moonlight had ceased to dazzle Keith. He gazed up into the face of that girl second from the left. What on earth had happened . . . She was black-eyed, aquiline. Her figure, too, supple but lean. Not Melody’s honey bloneness; not the Diana limbs of Melody.

The young engineer turned to his American neighbour. He achieved a husky whisper. “I say, sir, do you mind lending me those opera glasses?”

“Sure,” said a kindly Southern drawl.

Keith grabbed the glasses. He turned them upon the girl second from the left. A great blank fell upon him.

A stranger, in Melody’s place? He made sure.

And in the whole of the front row no Melody?

Chilled to the bone with disappointment, Keith took it in now. No Melody. Two of the Girls he thought he recognized? Wasn’t the little one in the middle the one they’d called Ginger, at the never-to-be-forgotten party? And the tall girl at the end of the row . . . he

fancied she had been there too? Might not. Might not! Girls all look alike, except one. But where was Melody? (Where, indeed?)

IV

Fuming with impatience Keith Cartwright had to wait for the end of the show, for the spectacular sensational finale, a picture of which Johnson-Brown Girls, Godiva Girls, Les Boys, Dwarf Acrobats, Abdulla the tiny negro singer, and a constellation of secondary stars, made a patterned background for Arabesque enlaced by her dancing partner. Fuming, young Keith made his way out of the babble of the applauding house. Sickening place, sickening show. He found himself stuffing notes into the hands of *ouvreuses*, of men in corridors. He arrived at a kind of hutch at the end of a flight of steps, and in the hutch lurked a doorkeeper who resembled a pug dog in a cloth cap. Of him, this English milord demanded to see one of the Girls Anglaises, Mademoiselle Mélodie Ouinne.

Ineffable raisings of French shoulders above French ears.

"But, Monsieur, of these English demoiselles there are forty. How should I know their names, and all such difficulties! Better that Monsieur should speak to their Captain, Mees—ah, my God!—Ehrakah. I telephone."

He telephoned up to say that an English monsieur was below demanding to see—

Another fuming wait for the luckless Keith.

At last. "Hullo? . . . Miss Wynne? Oh. Miss Wynne's gone," snapped a sharp voice. "She's not been here for some weeks."

"Has Miss Wynne gone back to England, please?"

"I don't know I'm sure! I know nothing about her. She left at a moment's notice after some unpleasantness with the management."

"But I say, I—"

The receiver had been hung up.

"Good God," ejaculated Keith. "But what's the meaning of that?"

The doorkeeper, who resembled a pug dog wearing a cloth cap, goggled upon him out of the hutch and shrugged.

"I suppose," said the young Englishman, in his own curt clipped speech, "that I had better wire instantly to Lilac Lodge?"

The doorkeeper goggled.

"Or," added Keith, standing like a lighthouse, very restrained though the roof of his mouth was dry, the palms of his hands wet, and his heart sick with hope deferred, "or I might wait and see these girls come out, spot one of her pals? Is this the way they'd come?"

Receiving no answer, he repeated his enquiry in (his) French, and was told certainly he might wait for the girls to come out; would he not have a chair?

"No, thank you very much, I'll wait . . ."

He waited. It seemed a month. He supposed they had to change, but would they never come . . .

Presently a storm of noise. Like dolls emptied from a sack of Father Christmas, there began pelting down the stairs, into the corridor, girl after girl. Little hats . . . short skirts . . . pink stockings, beige stockings, Florence Mills-coloured stockings, French girls so emphati-

cally vermillioned, blackened, or orange-rouged, so parrot-shrill, that in comparison the loudest of the Girls Anglaises who slipped by seemed so quiet . . . so neatly prim. . . .

Girl after girl. Little hats . . . silk stockings . . . another girl; another! Each as she passed turned an interested glance upon this extremely personable young man in the grey flannel suit, sunburnt to a tint so much darker than his hair.

Face after face, interested . . . coquettish . . . strange. . . .

v

At last and suddenly a face that turned, beamed into recognition, and cried, "Hullo! Why, if it isn't— Aren't you Melody's boy?"

"Rather!"

Joyous, relieved, Keith swept off his hat and took a step forward to the girl who had spoken. She had a motherly face, a bust to match it. Behind her pressed a very tall girl in grey, a dazzlingly fair girl in blue, a tiny gingery Cockney.

"I say? Aren't you Melody's pals?"

"That's right!"

"Oh, isn't this marvellous? Here's this nice fair boy she calls Keith . . . Hasn't he got brown—!"

"Fancy his turning up here!"

"Well, where should I be expected to turn up?"

"Of course. Sweet!—But we thought you were in India?"

The Clique made a ring to surround Keith. They held up the traffic in that corridor of the Arabesque, they

had to be moved on and out. ("But, mesdemoiselles, if you *please*—!") In the sunshine of a side street off the Boulevard Clichy, among barrows and French costers, the girls gabbled to Melody's Boy.

"Listen, dear! Didn't Mel. *know* you were coming back! . . . Wanted to give her a surprise, did you? . . . What, and she's not here! . . . What a shame . . . If only she'd known perhaps she wouldn't have—"

"Oh, Sybil, anyhow she'd have gone!"

Up strolled a boyish shape in a sand-coloured lounge suit, looking about. . . . Immediately the tallest of the girls ran up to him.

"Yes; there's Teddy. Teddy!"

The Young Oxford Chorus-boy joined the group.

"This is Mr. Marvell; he's a friend of Melody's too. This is Mr. Keith something; he's come all the way from India to look her up. Isn't it too bad, he never knew Melody had gone?"

"Well, she hasn't gone terribly far," drawled Teddy Marvell consolingly. "Are you over here for long? Couldn't you go on and dig her out of this caravan show?"

"Caravan?" repeated the bewildered Keith, standing there on the pavement centre of this group of theatricals. "What caravan?"

"Some rum new show young Melody's got herself into!"

"She'd have done lots better to get straight back home to London . . . Didn't I tell her?" exclaimed motherly Mamie. "I've got a picture-postcard from her in my bag . . . Here it is, Mr. Keith; have a look."

Keith stared down at a picture-postcard of fishers

mending their nets, at an address in well-known handwriting.

"*Theatre Platt, La Falaise, near Boulogne.*"

"Boulogne. I can get on there?"

"Rather, first thing in the morning," said Teddy cheerfully. "The boat train is at—"

"I can't," said Keith Cartwright, very firmly, "wait until to-morrow morning. I have got to push on to this place to-night, you see."

"Quite," said Teddy Marvell, who saw, and who exchanged a glance of understanding with his own sweetheart, Anne. All the Clique saw. "Four hours to Boulogne by train; six, seven, eight, nine o'clock . . . Get in in time for Melody's show; it's something too perfectly priceless according to her letter. You'll do it almost as quickly by car."

"Yes, I'll have to have a car," Keith agreed. "And pretty dashed quick."

VI

All the world—particularly the chorus world—continues to love a lover.

This was romance. . . .

Young Melody was in luck; let's hope she'd see it! Have a boy come dashing back like that, not a minute to waste, not so much as asking what it cost, a car all the way from Paris to the coast! Sweet, Mamie called him. They all sped him. The whole group of Girls, complete with Anne's Teddy and picking up Mamie's French dentist *en route*, accompanied Keith back to the Hotel Beaujolais, where the Clique to a girl invaded his crim-

son-and-gilded State apartment and helped to re-assemble his scattered belongings. Teddy, kneeling in his immaculately-creased trousers, lent a hand to tug at straps, while in the *reception*, Mamie's Frenchman, voluble and helpful, arranged that Keith should be driven to La Falaise without delay by the hotel proprietor's son, in his own new swift and cherished Renault.

To this group of new friends at the Beaujolais entrance, *plus* the Beaujolais proprietor, proprietress, cashier, three waiters, and pretty daughter of the house (the son having taken his seat at the wheel), Keith, once again all joyous anticipation, waved. Yes! the same well-known grey felt hat with the rain-spots—waved his *au revoir*.

"So long . . . Good luck! Wish we were coming with you, wouldn't it be divine?" chorused the delegation from the Arabesque. "Love to Mel!"

Tall Anne cried: "When you get back to Town *remembah* me to dear Colonel Wynne?"

Fair-haired Sybil clamoured for a bit of orange-blossom from the wedding-bouquet—

"You drop us a line to tell us if you *get* there all right, and how the girl *is*?" shrieked motherly Mamie, above the noise of the car starting up.

Tiny Ginger, clutching her friend's plump arm, protested in rich hoarse Whitechapelese: "*Oi!* Don't you watch 'im outer sight! That means bad luck!"

VII

So do not let us watch Keith's car out of sight. Leave that "sportif" little Renault, driven by the hotel proprietor's ultra-modern-French-sportsman son to thread her

way like a runaway dog at a fair in and out of the early-evening Paris traffic, leave her with the level rays striking lightning out of her bright bits and her mascot of a diving nymph; leave her to precipitate herself out of the City, off, along the road to Amiens, and away!

Let us return to those sand-hills of Hardelot plage, where we left Melody in the company of André Toussaint?

CHAPTER XVI

AWAKENING

*About the gift that certain
men have; and about the
mistake other men make*

I

To mention Love is to make it—according to these inflammable Continentals.

Melody, when she afterwards thought over this unparalleled afternoon, realized (getting it late, but getting it!), "I was a fool. I can't say that the man made love to me without any warning. I ought to have known. Hadn't I already noticed how emotional he was, how different from our men, bursting into chat about the Romance of Speed, and about the French 'having a different conception of Love'?"

They have; their very word "*L'Amour*" croons on a deeper note than our "Love." To use a more native image, it breathes a different perfume from that of our breeze-scented island love adventures; as different, say, as are Coty's latest essences from Old English Lavender-water. "*L'Amour*" remains persistent, cruder yet subtler,

ambered, redolent of so many and of quite other shades of meaning, motives, aspects, complications. "*L'Amour*" in this man's mouth would have been warning sufficient for the lady from Paris who had wept like a source to leave André Toussaint; warning sufficient for that poor little artist's model from Montparnasse whom he had secretly married to desert after blows. Only, his countrywomen would have expected both warning and sequel; French girls not being brought up in this Anglo-Saxon tradition of these day-long "pique-niques" with young men whose conversation from morn till dewy eve may be relied upon to treat blithely (as did the conversation of the athletic and serene Bill Wynne, for example) of the Utterly Impersonal—such a point of pride with the English. Yes, any one of these concentrated, deep-eyed, hippy, and "aware" French maidens, would—if any of them had let themselves in for this *tête-à-tête*—have been prepared. Further, any older more experienced woman of any nationality would before this time have realized that André Toussaint possessed a gift which could make a woman's world fade out around her as he spoke.

Power! Certain men use it to attach to themselves the devotion of horses and dogs; it is inborn, the gift with which certain other men can master any instrument of Music, so that melody twangs in heart-break from the single wire laid across the old cigar-box. Gift inexplicable as that reputed power over the element of Water (so that however deep the spring it recognizes tread above it of the dowser's foot, and down whirls the forked twig to signal "Here!"). The Power-to-sway-Women, is found, not always in men of sterling character, but not neces-

sarily in rotters (though males less gifted invariably view it with suspicion. Women, while helplessly attracted, cannot explain that Attraction.) Whisper for the ear, hand for the string, foot for the hidden spring! If more men had that gift it would doubtless lead to more disasters. If, however, all men had it there might perhaps be less rather than more lonely misery in the world. In any case it would make a different world for us women. . . . Possessed by this wastrel of an André Toussaint, the Gift, for those few moments of that afternoon, did threaten to make her usual world fade out for Melody Wynne. For an instant, yes. Both her worlds. Vanished, home-circle of English New Poor who cling to their old portraits and old traditions through all the changed and changing conditions! Vanished, her adopted Democracy of the chorus. No longer Colonel Wynne's youngest daughter, no longer the Clique's Melody, she was being hypnotized into this bundle of strange and awakened feminine nerves, that clamoured "Yes. This is what we have wanted; this is what for years we have missed! It's here. This is why we sensed that '*something vivid*' in the air as soon as you joined the Vagabond Show. It's here with this man who wakes you up to feel what it means to be a woman!"

The Apache! . . . A handsomer man, that is to say Orville K. Kent the Cowboy and Dancer, had not achieved it. Attracted and with this most seductive girl to himself, how had he put in the time? Maundering to her about his own grievances . . .

A man worth a hundred of either of them, Keith Cartwright, had not achieved this. Passionately in love with

Melody, he had made himself her shadow; he had, without any frills, proposed marriage. Refused, he had just longed and looked. . . . With one look he had really come near to making love . . .

But André Toussaint, the wastrel, had gone straight up to this girl made for Love and had definitely and efficiently made love to her. In that voice, you know . . . Listen, when next you hear one of these really splendid, "nice" out-of-door, public school, sporting Englishmen talking to a dog with a wounded paw. It is the note to convey reassurance, tenderest authority, completest understanding! And young Toussaint (who belonged to a race of whom the ways with a dog too often cause the Anglo-Saxon to see red) was master of that tone when he wished to coax a woman.

But, as for what actually occurred—

II

Perhaps better go back to the beginning of this interview, which was André Toussaint's sudden-as-ardent exclamation of "How exquisite thou art!" This, my dears, in reply to nothing more than the utterly and entirely matter-of-fact remark from Melody about the spiky dune-grass which had left a web of narrow white scratches on the peach-tanned skin of her legs.

"Exquisite!"

Could she have heard aright? She would have wondered, had she been allowed time to think before the young man rushed on in tender indignation—"It dared to hurt her, the grass to which it is permitted to kiss those shapely ankles! And to grass—grass! is given the caress

that should belong to a man?" Upon which he who had been sitting below her on the sloping sand, slithered, like a streak, a yard further down, then with one swift gesture he bent and bared his swart head before he touched his lips between the lacings of Melody's espadrille to Melody's ankle.

To this Melody reacted like the normal English girl. She sat briskly up, tucked both feet beneath her, and ordered him sharply, "Don't be an ass!" (In French, "Do not make the imbecile!")

"What? I may not even kiss her beautiful feet?"

"No, thanks," said Melody, and gave a quite usual laugh, though she felt an odd thrill of something like nervousness. Further, she, for all her strain of French blood, found difficulty in remembering the French for the phrases with which she wished to retort. "I don't care for that sort of thing."

"Cruel," retorted the Apache, in a vehement and troubling mutter, moving up again quickly and without seeming to move, speaking still in that whispered rush of words. "Thou lookest surprised? Why then didst thou accept to come out with me this afternoon?"

"Why?" There seems no answer to questions which there is no need to put; and it was the Apache who went on:

"For what reason does a man take a girl out alone? For the air-cure? For the study of the landscape? For the sport? No. For such enterprises he has his comrades—"

"Well, can't his comrades be girls? You *said*," argued Melody, "in the English fashion"—

"Pah. Phrases. We are in France. Thou art of the two nationalities, therefore listen—"

Melody Wynne's two nationalities seemed to react simultaneously; French strain purred, the other mocked: "Imagine any of this tripe said *in English!*" For to her, remember, nothing extravagantly tender had ever been said in the tongue of the Elizabethan poets, for it was also the tongue of her brothers and their nice friends, whom she had met at home, all pally and cheery; either that, or she had been at work with her equally breezy girl-friends . . .

"Listen, while a Frenchman tells thee all that is in his heart, and how, from the first day he has thought only of thy ravishing face—"

English Melody thought, "What rot!" French Mélodie whispered: "Continue to tell me—"

"—of thy chevelure of gold!"

"The Bun!" mocked Melody.

"—thy form of nymph!"

"Good God, imagine Keith," thought Melody, "saying that!" Up in the mind of Mélodie jumped the incredible impish retort, "Keith hadn't the intelligence. Ah, if only Keith *had* said that!" She heard her own voice, uncertain and embarrassed, saying, "You're mad?"

"Without doubt. A man is mad to love a girl so English, and therefore so cold, cold, cold. For no man," said André Toussaint with conviction, "has ever spoken to thee of Love—"

Instantly piqued, Melody threw him a look that protested "They *have!*" But without a break he went on, "No man has understood how to teach thee to love. Not

one of your rich sporting Englishmen" (a note of angry envy in his tone). "They who can offer themselves everything; the splendid car, the aerophage, the race-horse, and the world to rule. They, who can own the world's most beautiful women! . . . They, who understand neither how to give nor to take a caress! What a waste, my *Mélodie*," said André Toussaint. Anger died out of his voice, and his tone courted her, becoming as I have told you, that of the Anglo-Saxon with the wounded pet. The Power! The Gift!

Young Melody, in the act of rising with a lightsome, "Well, and this walk home?" was held back, not only by that dark-sleeved arm that tightened suddenly about her; from that she could have broken, had she wished. Had she wished—that was the point! A spell had fallen upon her own volition for an instant. She lost the use of her own thoughts as an insect loses the power of its wings, caught in the sticky sweetness of some insectivorous plant. She could only feel her own heart beating the alarm. Then hear her own name muttered by lips almost touching her ear. Thin, expert, scarlet lips of a man (who had long appraised and coveted), now muttered a phrase that drifted into a caress upon the nape of her neck, just where it was softest, warmest, downiest, under the Bun. The touch stung her into movement, into recoil, into a quick cry of "Stop that!" in English.

It also left her trembling from head to foot.

"Enough," she added in French and with a careless laugh and shake of the head tried to restore life to the normal; for this, you know, was idiocy. Not just the kiss on the back of her neck (which seemed to be where

they preferred to plant their stage-kisses, in Paris; good idea, too! It wasn't apt to take off the leading lady's lip-rouge) not the kiss, but to make any sort of fuss about it. Why go right up into the air (as Mamie would say) because a Frenchman (everybody knew the French "were like that," meaning next to nothing by it, so that you were obliged to "allow for the exchange") had tried to throw a bit of heavy love-making? And a kiss, these days? From stage people anyhow, it was the merest matter of course. Had not Teddy Marvell kissed her a most affectionate good-bye, with the rest of the seeing-off party, at the Gare du Nord! And as recompense for learning her part, didn't René, in the presence of the pianist and of his whole family, bestow hearty resounding kisses on both her cheeks?

But—but she knew that was *that*. And this? "Such a mixture," thought Melody incoherently through her resolve to be "normal" again, "of drinking a champagne-cocktail and getting an electric shock . . . extraordinary" . . . And, from head to foot, awakened feminine nerves begin to flutter like leaves in a rising storm.

Absurd! Fight this!

Colonel Wynne's youngest daughter having said "Stop," found that the man did understand this international term of sport (used, moreover, on the Continent at times, for which we Islanders employ the term "When!") It did a trifle surprise Melody that even before she added "assez" the Apache slackened and withdrew the arm that had caught her against a jerseyed breast . . .

Good. "What I want," she added, growing surer of

herself, "is to smoke a cigarette," and she was again surprised (scarcely knowing by hearsay of rules of the game at which this wiry, *fin*, cunning Latin was an adept) that he should with carelessness completer than her own thrust a hand into his pocket, pull out a handkerchief, a couple of fat mauve envelopes, some sous, a box of matches, and say only—

"*Zut!* I have no cigarettes."

"I've got some," said Melody, elaborately cheerful. She picked her woven straw pochette up from the sand beside her, took out the battered silver case which had belonged to her eldest brother David (killed ten years ago). It contained a ten-franc note, her card, and two Gold Flakes.

She offered it.

Quite ceremoniously the Apache gesticulated and said, "Oh, but no. I smoke one of yours before. I do not wish to rob you of all your cigarettes. That would be presumption."

Curiously chilled by the refusal, by the "you," and by the politeness which she did not recognize for what it was (drawing back of a snake before it strikes again, and more successfully) Melody knew no better than to blurt out, "You are diffident enough about my cigarettes! Yet you had the presumption just now—"

"To claim kisses," the Apache concluded in a flash swift as the striking of the snake. "Yes. That was different, was it not? That was not presumption."

"Why?" (Oh, Innocent!)

"Because when I take cigarettes from a woman, it is a

pleasure taken from her. When I take kisses from her it is a pleasure I share."

Colossal nerve . . .

But it was then that the child Melody ought to have remembered the warning of that fakir of Montmartre to "beware of a young man with a peculiar Gift."

This was indubitably the man. Melody, winged insect caught in that glue-y sweetness; Melody, well in the grip of that Power-over-Women, but with half of her inherited instincts still fighting that power, brought out defiantly: "You flatter yourself, Monsieur Toussaint!"

"Not so. I'll show thee." Swifter than a hunting cat springs on the nest, he caught her in his arms, again kissed her, this time well-aimed and full and lingeringly on the mouth. It seemed minutes that those thin hot lips clung to hers, and kissed her with that mingling of practice, zest and power which was all part of his gift; which had made René sum him up as a magnetizer of women!

It made her world fade, her heart beat, her blood race in emotion which only once before had touched her. Even that had been but the foreshadowing of this poignant break into consciousness. Above her a deep-toned note of music hummed softly, rose crescendo, roared angrily, died away . . . She never heard the passing of that aeroplane. Shrilly, the sea-swallows twittered . . . She never heard. Sky and sandhills were blotted out. She would scarcely have remembered her own Christian name; this Melody of two nationalities! (But you will understand that? Psychologically every woman is, as it were, of two nationalities. Of two at the very least.)

Somewhere within her a gay French ancestress rejoiced in this vividness of *L'Amour*. (Not love, but a force elemental as the wild breeze bending the dune-grasses, yet sophisticated as this trace of *chypre* that drifted to her . . . Whence? Probably from those mauve envelopes in the man's breast pocket.) Somewhere within her a sturdy British Puritan protested: "You'll hate yourself for this. You'll hate yourself presently, my lady!" This, more faintly. Rosy light dazzled Melody through her shut eyelids . . . in any case a rosier light, that of primitive Passion, would have transfigured out of all recognition this wooer who had happened to come at that moment, who happened to be this chaser and charmer of women . . .

Whole minutes it seemed before Melody, freeing her lips, heard a voice break from her to cry, aloud to sea and sky and sands, illogically, wildly, "Keith! *It ought to have been you!*"

III

Why could it not have been Keith, the man who had brought about Melody's first realization of Passion in this blinding flash after which never would she go back to what she had been, unmoved and blithe and cool? She had seen now what she could take from, what she could give to, a man. It ought to have been Keith—but Keith had never (except for one hint) shown himself other than reserved, restrained, after the fashion of the best type of Englishman; they who employed the world's most fascinating speaking-voices to lavish their only expressive

endearments upon . . . the setter with the wounded paw; finding them inappropriate to the woman beloved . . . Oh, their mistakes in Love! Will they never learn by them? Perhaps! Some of them, perhaps . . .

Now at this moment a cloud of dust was streaking along the road from Amiens, in the cloud a Renault, in the Renault two young men. One of them was telling himself: "I shan't brick it in the same way twice. Now's my chance. The moment I see her, after the show to-night, I shall take her in my arms to talk to her, make her get what I mean. Oh, girl, girl, all this time I've let you stay half-asleep!"

IV

Still miles away, Melody shook and glowed under that awakening kiss—Keith's fault that it came from the lips of another man! Keith's fault that it was the voice of a love-thief which now muttered, urgently, persuasive. "Thou wilt not any longer pretend, repulse me? In the future, in the South of France, everywhere, we shall be together, my *Mérodie*? Thou art now mine? Say. Say!"

What this mesmerized bundle of nerves which Melody Wynne had temporarily become would now have replied she was to wonder later on. Now, abruptly, the love-duel was held up, as there cut through the hectic emotionality that quivered in the air, the surcharged aura that surrounded a couple fencing, an Englishman's voice lifted in song.

It was one of those songs of the moment which the English race (with whom to sing of love is emphatically not to make love!) uses as obbligator to its work and

play. Tune was the usual amorous syrupy wail. Words exhibited the usual unashamed voluptuous *abandon*—

“One summer night you gave me a thrill,
I feel it still,
I always will!”

while the voice made the usual cheery, sexless noise with which these songs are rendered and sterilized.

“Then came a night when you said—

“So sorry! I say! did I walk into you?”

“Pardonnez-moi, excusez-moi, Mademoiselle.”

Bi-lingual apologies broke from two men who had been clambering up, then striding down the undulating chain of sandhills, had run down into their nook, had almost run down the couple sitting there absorbed.

V

Like a hare Melody sprang up.

A spell had snapped. The sky, which had faded from before her eyes, returned to confront them as a sea of rose colour. Close beside her appeared two flannelled masculine figures; one she recognized as that undergraduate in the coloured blazer who had been at tea in the lounge of the Grand Hotel; this was the youth who had been singing. The other was a man perhaps fifteen years older; leaner, beakier, soldier-built.

Back, back to Melody Wynne flashed the realization of a world she'd left. Swiftly she asked in English: “Do you happen to know the time, please?”

The elder man, a dark shape against flaming sky, twisted his wrist and made it about five to eight.

Horrified, Melody asked if he were sure his watch was right?

"I think so," the soldier returned. "What do you make it, Charles?"

Charles the Undergraduate made it four minutes to eight.

The appalled Melody turned to the Apache who had lounged to his feet. "The time! It's nearly eight o'clock, Monsieur Toussaint!"

As she said it she saw that something had happened to the Apache. With the mere appearance upon the scene of these Englishmen who were like a breath of fresh air, so astringent, so unmistakably the big-boned, loose-limbed, cold-tub, old-flannels, nice-tie, Anglo-Saxon type! That Apache had suddenly shrunk. He, who had been darkly, gipsyishly intriguing, looked suddenly swarthy. His picturesquely Latin Quarter get-up seemed a pitiful pose. Yes; his spell had snapped. Astounding, the force of contrast. Astounding how beside these two other men the Apache had become a fifth-rate theatrical, under-sized, un-bathed-looking, inferior. Awful he looked.

Melody, disillusioned in a flash, saw not too soon the basic commonness of the man, the "jarringness" which would never again stimulate, which must only grate upon her, and thought, "He *is* awful. Is this what the Rénés meant? Is this why they never would accept him?"

But now there was something else to be thought about.

"—My God, the representation which should begin before nine. And we who have to get back five miles or

six, to La Falaise. And this motor-bus to take us, it starts at what time?"

With a strange, unpleasant mixture of swagger and apology, the Apache announced: "It's gone, that bus." An intangible something in his manner admitted that he had known some time ago that it had gone, and that he had intended that Melody should miss it.

"Yes, the last bus went at seven," said the elder Englishman, intangibly conveying his guess that that fellow (that nasty bit of work in the Augustus John hat) had meant to let it go.

"And I who have to play the Vagabond's *maman* in an hour from now," added Melody, with the calm of desperation, remembering the encore performance, given by special request, of "*The Two Little Vagabonds*"; remembering René, Nanette, and all the comrades let down, remembering the management's fury. "We should be at the theatre, dressed and made up, by a quarter to nine. Heavens! What is to be done?"

"You must let me run you along the sands," said the elder Englishman, speaking to Melody and ignoring the hat. "Luckily the wind's still right. I'll take you as far as Equihen in my aerophaga. I've got it down there. Come along."

Hastening all out, they had left the dunes for the firm windy beach and had set their faces towards Hardelot when Melody pulled up.

"Oh! I've *forgotten* something! Left it in the sand-hills, where we were sitting. . . . David's cigarette-case!"

"Thy case?" took up the Apache, getting the word

"cigarette," and stressing his form of address to the girl. "I'll fetch it for thee." Already young Charles had turned to double back. The two raced each other to that nest in the sandhills, leaving the taller, leaner Englishman to stride on with Melody.

He had two minutes in which to say something he felt ought to be said:

"Are your people over here with you, Miss er—"

"My name's Wynne. I'm not with people. I'm in a theatrical company."

"So one gathered. Then your people are not with you? My name's Underwood. There was a Wynne in the battalion with me." He mentioned it; yes, it had been her brother David's. "I feel," added Underwood, "though, perhaps it's no business of mine, I feel that David Wynne wouldn't have cared much about our picturesque pal in fisherman's togs?"

Melody, hastening over firm sand at his side, tried to sound indignant. "You may think theatrical people funny, but I—I find nothing in life is much funnier than anything else in life, Mr. Underwood!"

"Major," he put in, with a whimsical look. "Beastly rank, I find! No distinction, no romance. Means a man is just old enough to grouse at the Amusements of the Modern Girl."

Melody had to laugh. This Major who had known David was so blessedly breezy, so polo-ground, so Grand National and Boat Race Day, so usual and reassuring that she could not take offence.

Behind them raced up the other men, the undergraduates ahead, holding aloft Melody's silver case.

Followed the wild rush of putting off in Underwood's aerophage.

"Built for two; I can pack in three. . . . You all right, Miss Wynne? Can you shift a little to the right? Trim, Charles."

Melody had not realized that "three" meant herself and the Englishmen. "But Monsieur Toussaint has to play to-night too!"

"He'll find a car, or something. Plenty of lorries. Sorry, no room," said Major Underwood, obviously decided that however the actor in fisherman's togs reached his destination, it should not be by his beach-yacht.

Off she sped, on those winged wheels; in under ten minutes she would reach the end of the plage, the opening to the road that runs down past Equihen's life-boat shed. She sped, swifter than Keith's Renault was then speeding along the switchback road to Boulogne. "Joy-ride!" the wind shrieked in Melody's ears. "Joy-ride!" A matter of seconds before Underwood's aerophage looked from Hardelot like a white sea swallow on the beach. Far behind it, slim and tense as a black pencil stuck upright in the sand, the Apache was left standing.

VI

Still with fury, André Toussaint stood; anyone catching sight of the look on that hatchet-face would have been justified in prophesying that this dark young man might certainly be dangerous to Melody.

"That girl," he whispered, with other words. Hot within him kindled the humiliated male's lust for speedy revenge. "She'll regret this . . ." Clenching hands at

the side of his chest, he took to his heels head towards Hardelot, and started running like the wind.

CHAPTER XVII

HOUSE FULL

*About why the leading lady was late; about
a play that thrilled your grandparents;
and about what happened to the collection*

I

"THANK GOD there's no speed limit in France!" ejaculated Keith Cartwright when, barely an hour later, he and the Renault and his driver (one from the other hardly distinguishable for dust) reached La Falaise. Another five minutes, and he had found the local Garage, had found the *Hotel des Bains* where he left, to be restored with meat and wine, the son of the Beaujolais; then, without waiting for a mouthful, Keith followed the direction given to that Market-square of caravans and show-tent.

"Now, then—" breathed Keith, looking about.

Under the night-sky the expected glamour of the Show had come into its own. You did not see the ash-can detail; you got the broad, romantic effect. Flares of light showed up the dark mysterious frieze of caravans. Some of their windows were rose-red oblongs patterned by moving silhouettes. (Melody there?) Other windows, uncurtained, gave lavish glimpses from which the young man turned hastily away with a "Jove! Just like the Mater's Hogarth print, '*Strolling Players Dressing in a Barn*'."

With a group of playgoers in seaside clothes, he sought the box-office, that kitchen table and chair with wooden poster announcing—

LES DEUX GOSSES

*Grand Drama in Five Acts
and Seven Scenes*

Phenomenal Success

—of which none of you, sophisticated neo-modern theatre “fans” and St. John Ervine-ites have ever heard. Nor had Keith.

“*Two Little Vagabonds*” was merely the rage of London and Paris, decades ago. Ever since then it has been playing somewhere on the road, touring provincial by-paths, still raising the laugh, drawing the tear. Not, of course, from you, superior young disciples of Mr. Noel Coward! But ask your grandparents about this play, and you will hear how it dripped luscious with love-making; gripped, tense as any Edgar Wallace thriller with crook-adventure and villainy, quite apart from its main theme of how a little boy of good French family was abandoned by his father to be brought up by thieving tramps. You will hear how he was their slave; bullied and starved, and still, for all his rags, his dirt, and his gutter-slang, retaining his spirit and well-bred look. You will hear how his one friend, the other little Vagabond, was a poor, brow-beaten waif just out of hospital, with a cough like an asthmatic sheep. Then you will hear how for ten years the first Vagabond’s mother raked France

for him in vain, until at last by chance she comes across the tinker's caravan and the two little vagabonds, one of whom is her unrecognized child. To buy medicine for this, his sick pal, Vagabond the First picks his (unknown) mother's pocket, but repents, restoring the purse with a fine air before he runs away from the tinkers to fresh adventures. Meanwhile the seeking parent has been recognized by the tinker's gang, who palm off upon her, in default of her vanished boy, the sick Vagabond. Wrong boy is taken to right boy's luxurious home, leading to fresh complications. Not to mention the raking up of compromising love-letters (the usual start of the trouble). How you bright young moderns would scoff at the absurdities of the piece! To-night it was to serve as melodramatic *obligato* to the play in real life of some of the Strollers, some of their friends . . .

II

Keith Cartwright approached the receipt of custom, at which sat the bundle of grubby shawls which wrapped the theatre's proprietress, with, upon one side of her a stack of unclean tickets, on the other the bowl of winks into which she dipped—picking out the winkle with a bent brass hairpin.

“Er—Madame!”

This unspeakable crone held out to Keith a grimy claw with a grimier ticket: “No more reserved seats, Monsieur!” She regretted, but Monsieur must find room at the back.

“San fairy ann,” exclaimed Keith, with a disarming, excited smile that won even Madame Platt to the extent

of a courtesy she sometimes showed to her theatre's habitués. Monsieur loved so much the drama? She held up her grisly saucer of winkles.

"*Prenez, Monsieur!*"

"Oh! Er—merci, but," Keith assembled his presence of mind and French to explain that to him it was forbidden to eat fish. To soften this refusal he added: "I have a friend in this theatre. Mademoiselle Wynne. She is playing to-night?"

"Ouinne? Mélodie?" said the hag.

She cocked a mercilessly-intelligent eye up at this Englishman; tall, broad-shouldered, burnt brick-brown to the collar-line, and dusty as an auricula, who halted at her table. "Monsieur is the friend of Mélodie? Ah. Fortunate. Almost Mélodie did not arrive to-night. She was very late!"

"Late? Why?"

The grimy shawl-clad shoulders shrugged. "Almost she was too late," grumbled Madame Platt, "to play the *maman* to-night. A pretty rôle. Pass, Monsieur."

Keith, with growing anticipation, stooped, to pass in under the canvas flap. "Bit of a contrast, this," he thought, "from her Music Hall Arabesque, and all that Cubist stuff, and that brand-new scenery which must have cost the earth, and those fifty-foot silver curtains sweeping down to the footlights!" He looked about. No wonder those girls in Paris said it was a rum show Melody had got herself into. Never mind! A laugh of pure excited joyous anticipation broke from Keith. "Place doesn't matter. As long as she's *here!*"

"Here," was a whacking-big draughty tent; it must

seat quite twelve hundred; circle, pit, and gallery on wooden benches; five-franc stalls being equally hard, green-painted garden chairs. In front of the stalls planks were laid down to prevent feet of the audience from sinking into mud. They were occupied by the stripy blazers, white jumpers, bright-coloured hair nets of French visitors.

The only Englishman in the house, Keith pushed his way to the back, and found standing-room among fishermen in blue jerseys or wall-flower-brown blouses with sailcloth trousers, among fisher girls in long stuff skirts, stuff bodices over taut stays, clean kerchiefs tied under chins, and with faces dignified, solemn, and aristocratic compared with the sunburnt noisy towny visitors—the village's floating population, few of them staying even as long in this place as would its Vagabond Show.

"Good Lord, when are these people going to begin?" fretted the impatient Keith. He had had an endless day of this suspense; a long train-journey, thirsting for the sight of his girl. A dash into that *matinée* where he had drawn a blank. A reckless car-drive from Paris. Now, more waiting? "I should have had time for a hot bath," thought he (little knowing his Falaise!). It was nine o'clock. Still that canvas curtain, painted to represent jam-coloured drapery, was bellying in the draught. The orchestra—one travelling piano—was still empty.

Ah! Enter pianist, a large business-like matron in black, wearing about her shoulders a grey woollen scarf, with, clinging to her skirts like a twig caught there in passing, an elfin child with long fair corkscrew curls.

This elf drifted in silence towards a friendly lap in

the front row, while the pianist, seating herself, dashed vehemently into a loud overture, grabbing up wrong notes in handfuls, with the action of one who weeds. This over, she turned for a friendly word with the front row of the stalls.

No wonder Keith swore softly under his breath as he glanced again at his wrist. Five minutes past nine.

Every seat taken now. Not only was Keith standing there towering above several standing fishermen at the back, but a border of fisher-children were being pushed against its canvas sides. Of this show it was, as he thought, literally true to say, "*House full. Walls bulging.*"

III

Bang, bang, bang! Deafening thumps of hammer on wood. Simultaneously, loud ringing of a dinner bell in wings to the right. At last! Up went the curtain on a set that looked to Keith like a workhouse corridor, but which, actually, represented bachelor quarters of the dashing young French officer.

Scene one.

Enter dashing young French officer . . .

Enter batman of dashing young French officer.

Enter a tall shapely white-clad feminine figure . . . a white tennis frock, a scarlet hat (of Nanette's, between ourselves!) carrying a scarlet sunshade. Turning to the actor in uniform she spoke. Her delicious voice rattled away French speech, disconcerting, rapid, and unfamiliar, but from a well-known smiling mouth . . .

Yes! It was Melody! *Melody!*

The man who had travelled thus far and fast to see

her, had scarcely hoped that she would appear thus at the play's actual start. This was wonderful. Moistening his lips he stared, above the dim crowds, at the stage's lighted panel in which was framed the shapely figure of that leading lady.

There she was. After all these months away from her. Months of memories, now here she was in the flesh. And good God, how exquisite the darling looked! From wide eyes to slim ankles, what a reward for a man's longing gaze!

Keith fastened it upon her, watching her, listening to her as she did her British best with the part of the virtuous young French matron, sister to the indiscreet lady who had involved herself with that French officer—out of whose keeping incriminating love-letters must be cajoled. That was Melody's rôle. And her acting? Keith, a young man usually not without the sense of criticism, took absolutely no heed of that.

(In parentheses I may tell you that his Melody was the one member of the Company who was not first-rate. She, bless her, looked what she was. One of the chorus pushed into a part. Cast for one of these centres of attraction in real life, in drama she remained a graceful amateur . . . The other Strollers—Lord, how excellent they were! Their scenery might be faded, travel-stained, torn, and flaking off with eld; their uniforms were obviously picked up from some old clo' dealer. But for stage sense, gesture, delivery, and naturalness, you super-civilized First-nighters would find your work cut out to discover a London cast to better these vagrants. The whole lot of them were born competents—with that one exception.)

Keith, from the back, watched his darling's every movement . . . every movement she made woke in him tender enthusiastic response. When, *when* would they have the interval?

There was, of course, no programme in the theatre . . .

There at the back he towered, the travel-worn Englishman, waiting breathless and fuming, the one and only spectator in all those rows who wished to hurry a single line of this play; while on the stage that melodrama unfolded itself, scene by scene, in improbable but coherent action that gripped the rest of the house.

IV

Came the point where one of these written messages, that inevitably take the wrong turning, got into the hands of Melody's stage-husband—of whom Keith noticed that he was an actor of fifty-odd, with dyed black hair; he did not notice how the practised handling of René's part showed up Melody as the rawest beginner of a darling blunderer . . .

His presence all unsuspected by the girl he watched, Keith devoured the picture she made with her "child," that same ringleted elf who had drifted into the stalls just now with its actual mother the pianist, and he thought: "God, how sweet she is! Some day, with any luck, she'll be cuddling one of mine in her lap like that. Melody! How soon?"

On the stage, Melody's husband, drawing the worst conclusions, had become convinced that the long-haired infant was none of his. Deaf to his wife's pleading, he shouted her down, chasing her off the stage (left): "*Go,*

go! *Leave me to think!*" with a gesture of such blind and savage anger, that it startled Melody into her only first-rate facial expression of the evening—that of real fright—while at the same time she almost caught her foot in a loose plank. Upon her exit, the burglar took his cue.

Stealthily the burglar (played by old Monsieur Tous-saint, the worse for brandy, though this did not show in his part) pushed up the window at the back of the stage. Stealthily he made to jump down. The stage-husband wheeled. Out with the ready revolver, hands up! Caught! Snivelling appeal from the burglar. Actually he was to be let off; given his chance. "*Provided you take away something here,*" thundered Melody's stage-husband, "*of which I wish to get rid.*"

Diving into the wings (right) he re-enters carrying sleeping child (whose ringlets, dangling over his arm, drew from the house the customary adoring murmurs of "*Ah*" and "*Qu'il est mignon!*").

"*Take him!*" shouted the injured Husband to the Burglar, "*and nevermore let me set eyes on either of your faces.*" At this line all lights went out, leaving stage and show tent in inky blackness.

This constantly happened. At almost every town they had ever played the electricity had failed suddenly, and there was an interlude while the house ironically clapped and jabbered, and the actors on the stage froze into their positions, waiting for an oil lamp to be thrust out of the wings by the hand of Monsieur Platt; upon which the electricity usually functioned once more. This time the lights went up promptly—upon the re-entrance of Melody, the drama's virtuous young mother.

Listen (as Keith, all ears listened!) to this scrap of Melody's perfectly ridiculous part—

Virtuous Young Mother: *"Where is my baby? What have you done with my child?"*

Injured Husband (superbly): *"I have disposed of him. I have given him to a burglar"* (sweeping gesture towards window). *"Since he is the child of Sin, let him be brought up among thieves. Too late to look for him now—"*

(Here, re-enter to the stalls, sucking candy, the cork-screw-curved child whose rôle was finished for the evening. Until well after midnight he could now remain to watch at leisure, proceedings of her grown-ups. Indeed, for the rest of that tour this child would drift in and out of that show tent, appearing now on the stage, now behind, now in front; just like a frail daddy-long-legs that drifts in and out of a window.)

Injured Husband: *"Do not hope to see your child again! That, never! He is gone."*

Virtuous Young Mother (in anguish): *"Gone? But not without a word? Did he not struggle? Did he not look for me, or stretch forth his little arms, or cry for his Maman?"*

Injured Husband (curtly): *"No, he did not know what was happening. He slept. I took him in his sleep."*

Virtuous Young Mother (outraged): *"What? Scoundrel! You could not even respect the slumber of a child?"*

Applause, sobs, curtain, and interval.

"At last!" Young Keith made frantic movements to extricate himself from the group of standing fishermen, the last row of benches, "In this interval I can get out and see where Melody—"

Here, unexpectedly, the curtain rose again. Upon the empty stage there entered that actor who had taken the burglar, and who (in the voice that had once rung through a Paris theatre) announced that he had the honour to inform the spectators that to-morrow the Show removed itself, but not far, to Pont des Briques. To-morrow evening at half-past-eight, there would be given a performance of that exquisite modern operetta, "*The Merry Widow*." Also, that he had the honour to inform them a collection would now be taken up for the benefit of the artistes. One of the ladies of the troupe would now go down into the house to take up that collection. "Good evening, ladies, and gentlemen, and thank you in advance!"

The curtain fell.

Keith found a solid block of fisher-folk between him and the tent's entrance.

V

Behind, on that dark rickety platform representing the wings, old Toussaint, breathing brandy, stopped that "lady of the troupe" who, in her white tennis frock, was preparing to go round the audience with a large coarse earthenware collecting saucer.

"And my son, Mélodie?" demanded the old "comic," thickly. "My son André, whom you accompanied for that promenade to Hardelet this afternoon? What has become of André?"

"I don't know, Monsieur Toussaint," replied Melody, standing there in distress holding her saucer. "I had to come back to the theatre without him; I explained that?"

She had tried to explain, and an awkward, impossible job it had been. Forgetting of the time . . . missing of the Hardelet autobus . . . meeting of English *monsieur* who had taken her, Mélodie, to Equihen in his beach-yacht, leaving André Toussaint to the chance of any car or lorry there might be on the roads. . . . André, who had to play the Apache in the Thieves' Kitchen, in Part Two after the interval! André's father had scowled and growled; his mother had lifted up her voice and wept.

Outcry from old Mother Platt, who had stormed and screeched at Mélodie that she was fined ten francs for being late, and that further Mélodie was not to forget she must take up the collection for that evening's performance (a job the girl disliked).

Worse; her good friends the Rénés had been obviously disgusted. Instead of their matey and family grin they had turned upon her a glance of distant reproach. Even the Rénés? The flappers' "Good evening" had been a model of *jeune fille* politeness; could you imagine a more beastly reception? And Nanette! Usually the world's most consoling *pet* of a motherly pal! Nanette, when Melody thought to bring her round to her normal geniality by inquiring about that lost kitten, had replied with a short "*Found.*" Not even explaining that the little cat had been discovered ravenous but unharmed, shut into one of the dress-baskets. Not even troubling to ask where, by the way, Mélodie herself had spent this afternoon . . . All being beasts to her. Melody, feeling for the first time in years shut out, small, humiliated, and not far from childish tears, had to leave it at that, to bite her soft lips, stiffen her straight back, scamper into her van, and

get dressed and made up in record time for her first entrance.

As for her part? Never had she gone through it so woodenly; infuriating and putting off his own stroke of the temperamental René . . . The entire Company, usually indulgent, were all at logger-heads to-night with their *Mélodie*. Was she not responsible for this upset and for the re-casting of that important scene in the Thieves' Kitchen, if, before another two scenes were played, the actor who played the Apache did not contrive to get back?

"No sign of André," savagely muttered Toussaint *père*. "Through your fault, *Mélodie*!"

"I am very sorry," Melody said for the fiftieth time. Adding vehemently, though silently, "Sorry I'm born!"

She would have cut off her bun of cherished gold-brown hair if, by so doing, she could have prevented the doings of this ill-starred day behind her. Day which had begun so sunnily in the stir of the crowded Market, had gone on into a light-hearted escapade of fresh air, breezy plage, masculine confidences! Day which had culminated in those moments of electric love-making, that magnetizing kiss! Day which had ended in a breathless scamper to be in time for this show, and which was now fizzling out in the anti-climax of taking up this beastly collection.

Sick at heart, Colonel Wynne's youngest daughter, holding her saucer, sighed and moved down the step-ladder beside the stage and to the front of the hot, gabbling, humanity-scented show-tent.

VI

At that juncture André Toussaint, with his feet up on a bicycle's handlebars, was speeding downhill on the road to La Falaise, and all the more recklessly because at the café where he had raised the bicycle he had had recourse to his father's consolation . . .

VII

"How could I have let that brute kiss me? How *could* I? Like some horrible dream. Like having been hypnotized or something. Feels now as if I must have gone completely batty for one moment," thought Melody, who never before had encountered a hang-over of *L'Amour* (another aspect, possibly, in which *L'Amour* differs from mutual and heady Love). "How I'm ever going to let him look at me again with his horrible piercing greedy black eyes like black-beetles running all over me—brrrr! —I don't know. Lord, how I hate all these foreigners," thought the goaded and for the time being all-British Melody, moving slowly between packed rows of five-franc stalls. "What wouldn't I give to be with my own people to-night! *Merci, Madame!*"

Into the saucer chinked the playgoers' subscriptions; little fifty-centime bits, dingy francs, an occasional two-franc piece.

"*Merci, merci, monsieur.*" Chink, chink! "I wonder what the audience would think if they knew what becomes of this collection that is supposed to be for the benefit of the artistes?"

(The collection was poured, with the other profits, into

the coffers of the management Platt; as Nanette said: "It was not by forgetting small sums that one built up important savings like theirs." All for the Platts, minus just the three-franc perquisite allowed to the collector.)

"Two one-franc-fifty stamps with which to write home . . . These are the times one wishes one dash' well never had left home. Oh, Lilac Lodge! Daddy, Bill, all those nice, decent, *washed*, topping people! No wonder Major Underwood said what he said . . . What I wouldn't give to be out of all *this!*" Chink! "*Merci, Monsieur.*" Chink, chink . . . "*Merci bien, Mademoiselle!*"—

And on went the lady of the troupe, threading her way between rows of knees towards the back where there remained to be gleaned the humble harvest of perforated sous, nickel or copper, from the fisher-folk. "*Merci, Mademoiselle . . . Pardon! Monsieur?*"

Mechanically she had been performing her office, hardly seeing anything but the collecting saucer, the succession of hand after sunburnt hand dropping in coins. Abruptly she became aware of that well-known feeling which is caused when from a distance eyes are fixed intently upon one's face.

Melody, feeling eyes upon her, raised her own.

Two rows away, a man, tall and broad-shouldered, standing under one of the unshaded lights that blazed down on his fair head, was holding out a hand. Melody, pre-occupied, made herself smile, mechanically, brightly, as, in response, she stretched out to the stranger over the heads of a bunch of fisher-children, her collecting saucer half full of coins. She gave a mechanically bright, "*Merci, Monsieur.*" She looked at him; then she thought: "Hullo,

actually an Englishman? *What* an attractive young man, too," before, in the very next flash she recognized who this man was.

Yes, just as it had happened on a morning three months ago in London, when Melody had thought it was an attractive stranger who confronted her, just because he turned up unexpectedly at a place and time unusual to him.

"Keith!" she cried sharply, and let that saucer of sous fall jingling into the aproned lap of the fishwife sitting between them. "*Keith?*"

CHAPTER XVIII

ENTR'ACTE

*About after-effects of an escapade;
and about some differences between
Anglo-Saxon and Latin love-making*

I

"RATHER," laughed Keith Cartwright, exultantly. "I don't wonder you ask; can't see me for dust, I suppose? Hadn't time to get it off me."

Melody, over tumult, produced a quite excellent imitation of the casual neo-modern hail. "Keith, old thing! Too amazing—"

They stood, staring at each other. The whole of Keith's being seemed to rush towards her through his clear and steady gaze. Wedged among rows of heated thickly-clad fisher-folk (who were all eyes and interest) in that simmering show-tent atmosphere of Maryland cigarettes, trampled mul, fish, heat, humanity, under that beating

light of unshaded electricity which made of the whole place half a glare, half a murk (rather like the abrupt illumination in Melody's mind as she stared upon her old sweetheart) they waited half a heart-beat . . .

Melody dared not wait longer. "Yes, too *amazing!* You! Turning up in the middle of— Why aren't you in India, Keith? When did you land? *Viâ Marseilles?* How brown you are— Well, how are all the dear Rajahs, and what sort of a voyage—"

"Ah, *merci, madame,*" she added to the fishwife into whose lap she had dropped her collecting saucer, and who was now grabbing up coins by the fistful, to pour them back with a "*Voilà, Mademoiselle!*"

She could have blessed the woman for the diversion. Something quite new had happened to Melody Wynne. Like a wave of some surging tide caused by some far-off sea-storm, there rose, overwhelmed and well-nigh choked her, a flood of shyness . . .

Keith, hurriedly stooping to retrieve dropped sous from the mud, missed Melody's scorching blush. Imagine that through the stage make-up, which like jam spread over ivory, smeared the principal's flawless skin, there glowed this ignominious, Victorian manifestation! She writhed with shame; and ducked hastily for the spilt coins, so that all Keith saw was the back of her profuse gold-brown Bun.

A very different greeting the young man had planned, resolved to rush her at last into seeing that there had been enough of cross-purposes, and that if ever man and girl had been meant for each other it was just they two. But here was a highly-scented rabble into which Melody had

squeezed . . . Straightening himself as he rose, Keith dropped coins back into that saucer, lifted his shining head, and with a frown between his fair brows, stared about. "Full house, isn't it! Rather much of a fug . . . Get out of it, shall we? We'll snatch a spot of fresh air outside—"

Ah, charming low-pitched, familiar, English voice in the midst of this Continental parrot-house! Melody had found it a relief to hear Major Underwood speak this afternoon, a relief to encounter the thoroughly British atmosphere of that soldier and that undergraduate. But, Lord, how much more attractive was Keith than those two! Keith, so big and blonde and radiant. Keith, with a new air, too, of decision, under his gentleness, as he added, "I want to talk to you, Melody."

Melody, enraptured, panic-stricken—"Can't! My dear, I've got to get back again, behind."

"What? Just when I've come?" (Inevitable attitude of even your nicest man when the woman's profession, the woman's activity, runs counter to his courtship.) "Melody, I've come here on purpose to—"

"But seat yourself, Mademoiselle! Seat yourself," ejaculated the fishwife who had picked up the coins. She was a kindly, heavy-skirted body who, though she did not understand English, had grasped the gist of this dialogue. "My husband will budge." ("Budge, Pierre, wilt thou!" she cried to the jerseyed man next to her, pushing him off the end of the bench.) Then she bumped her rotund form further to the left. She gesticulated to an empty place and a half; she beamed encouragement. "Seat yourself, Monsieur!"

With the gesture of alighting for one instant only, Keith let his long grey-flannelled length down on to the extreme edge of that bench, Melody perching beside him and holding on to her saucer as though it were a life-belt.

"Well, it'll only be half a second . . . What have you been doing," began Melody, slightly breathless, "since I saw you?"

"Tell you presently. What have *you* been doing?"

"Oh—all sorts of exciting things, Keith—" She hardly remembered one. Swept away, those months of chorus-work in Paris. Swept away, these later adventures of the travelling theatre. Blotted right out, to-day's incredible escapade—

But no! This afternoon's adventure had not left Melody without its after-effects. She had made a discovery which, thrilling her to the core, brought with it this agony of conscious shyness. . . . Keith, unaware of Melody's feelings, was furiously aware that old inhibitions and new difficulties threatened to divide him from his love. Here she sat, squashed so closely against him by these villagers, that through flannel of his sleeve, through thin stuff of her frock, Keith's arm caught her shoulder's solid velvet warmth. Yet Melody herself seemed so remote. Melody displayed her old power of being near, yet miles away. Had one come back across land and sea, from another continent, from another hemisphere, for this?

Lightly she asked how on earth he'd unearthed where she was?

"Looked up some of your theatre pals in Paris." (He might have been in Paris for days.) "I say, my dear, this is a new line for you, isn't it? Isn't it a bit of a—"

"Oh, it's one long rag, Keith; I love it," Melody hectically assured him. "Didn't you think us rather good?"

"Yes, but—"

"But the two Vagabonds haven't been on yet. My 'child,' as he's grown up. Mariette's marvellous in it," Melody gabbled to Keith as if this were all he had travelled leagues to hear. "You ought to see some of our repertory. . . . Had you ever heard of a play called '*The Lyons' Mail*'? We do it! We do—"

A ten-year-old ragamuffin, hawking a tray of peanuts done up in screws of dirty newspaper, turned up to Melody his sharp-eyed grin as he stumped past their row, and greeted her by name.

"What nerve!" Keith thought, outraged and scandalized that this mob of toughs of all ages should be thus matey with his Melody.

She, returning the ragamuffin's greeting, told Keith, "That's Henri. He's the management's grandson—"

"Is he? All this is dashed amusing, but, look here, I want—"

"—don't you think they're wonderful, the way these French keep any profit in the family? Every centime for sweets and nuts goes to the Management—"

"Priceless, but look here, my dear girl. I haven't come here to chat about any management. . . . How long have you taken this infernal engagement *for*?"

"With the Platts? Another four weeks, might be five. From here we go on to Pont de Briques, next village. Twelve caravans and a tractor to drag them. That's tomorrow."

"Then what do you think you do?"

"Place called Desvres, I believe."

"I don't mean that; I mean when you finish up with this tour."

"Oh, I've planned," Melody told him glibly, "to join forces with some of the troupe (that dark man who was playing my husband, and his wife and girls) when they go on to the South of France. They've a chance of a job for me. Dancing again."

"Dancing again," repeated Keith blankly. "I see."

Never had he seen less!

II

Had he only guessed at the transformation in this Melody of whom he was thinking, "*Still joy-riding . . . It's going to be no good? She's just the same . . .*" Ah, the blindness, even of your intelligent young man in love!

Last Spring, when this same Keith, holding her to his heart under the lilacs, had looked so passionately into her eyes, she had met the stormy caress of his gaze. Now for the life of her she could not meet his eyes.

Ah, not indeed without after-effects, this afternoon's awakening kisses from André Toussaint among the sand-hills! Love-making of a man without any of these Anglo-Saxon reserves had stirred this sleeping beauty—to what? Realizing exactly how wonderful could have been love-making from a very different sort of man; kisses from Keith. Dear Keith, of the frank fair face, and the idealistic eyes; Keith who for years had loved her, how she could have loved him!

Abruptly she got up from the bench beside him.

He rose quickly.

"Yes, let's get out. About time. Where do we go and talk—?"

"Oh, but that's not why I got up. I can't come out with you now, Keith!"

"What? But you must! Oh, you will—"

"Can't! Duty calls." Achieving quite a good laugh she rattled her collecting saucer. "I've got to take this thing back to old Mother Platt."

"Won't take you a minute, Melody. I'll come too, and then we can talk."

"We can't possibly. Because then I've got to go on again. I've got to dash across to my van, take off this frock, and change into deepest mourning for my lost child."

"Not," said Keith—dear Keith who combined one primitive dash of the now-scrapped Cave-man ideal with being the new, the preferred model of the comrade-lover—"not before we've had this out."

Lord, anybody would be lucky to marry Keith . . .

That was the discovery which held Melody from meeting her true lover's eyes or finding words. Turning away her head, she bit vermillioned lips, frowned at the canvas walls, and desperately, she thought, "Curse dancing! A thousand curses on any South of France job! And ten thousand curses on that brute Toussaint! God knows I'd hate to go where he'd be. Or to see him. Or to do anything but get back home to England with Keith!"

Keith meanwhile thinking, "*Can't* I make her change her mind?"

Poor Keith! Equally, or rather far more, poor Mel-

ody! Cross-currents of love met, tossed, seethed about the lovers as they perched there on that narrow bench in that over-heated tent, elbowed by strangers, blinking in the murk and glare—and both yearning for one moment in the solitude of that lilac-scented English garden, in the purple gloaming of that Spring night!

How it had been wasted, then . . .

All this in the few seconds before Melody gabbled, "My dear old boy. I'm dreadfully sorry . . . can't have anything out. Must go."

"Why?" Really angrily he stared down at her . . . (Keith, darling mixture of modern Progress, old clothes, sex-attraction, engineering, human equality, and authoritative voice.) "When does this blasted thing finish?"

"Started late to-night, there's miles more! Scene in the Thieves' Kitchen! Unlocking Seine flood-gates . . . death-scenes, murders, every brand of thrill. London's Little Theatre has nothing on us. Lucky if we're through before midnight. I'll have to see you to-morrow, Keith."

"You'll have to nothing of that sort!" declared young Keith, setting a clean-cut chin, and glaring down as if upon one indeed hateful to him. Remember he was dog-tired, dinnerless. He was over-wrought, he was exasperated into most uncharacteristic fluency with this girl, to whom—also most uncharacteristically—he yearned to give a piece of his mind at last. "Look here, Melody, is this the way to treat a man? After he has been travelling—No! stop, listen to me!—after he has been travelling God knows how many hours to get to you? All last night and half to-day from Marseilles to Paris—"

Startled, Melody exclaimed, "You didn't come on from Paris to-day?"

"What do you take me for? When I found you weren't in Paris, naturally I raised a car and dug out a fellow to drive me. His Renault did it in under four hours."

"Where—where did you have dinner?"

"I'd a light lunch on the Paris express at mid-day, and at the Beaujolais your young pal called Marvell rammed a small wiski-soda and a biscuit into me, and that was that."

"Oh, Keith, Keith, was that all you've had to eat?" Melody cried, and for the first time there sounded in her voice the note of love, melting and melted. Keith, with his temper thoroughly up, was past hearing it.

A young man of Latin blood, when he is making love, talks to a woman of herself. The Anglo-Saxon talks to her of himself. Which may account for the success, with many English women, of any foreigner? Many other English women, however, react to tradition, and they continue to be won as their grandmothers and their great-grandmothers were won, in and by the old way. Or, perhaps, in spite of the old way? Is it the triumph of the Englishman himself over the Englishman's methods?

The young Englishman in question, all wound up, pursued angrily: "Naturally one didn't let any grass grow under one's feet. One comes here, finds you, you, in the middle of this infernal French penny gaff. You going round with the hat. Pretty grim. Would any man want to see his—no, dash it! A bit thick! But you say it's one long rag? Wandering about like—like the raggie taggle

gipsies—oh, with this ghastly gang! You're full of that! All you think of. You've nothing to say to me except that it's time you went and changed into mourning. God."

"Keith, I've got to go now, but—"

"I won't keep you. I've said all I've got to say. If this is the life you prefer to me, right. As you kindly indicated to me when I had the honour to ask you to marry me and come out to India, you'd rather have a joy-ride on your own. I haven't forgotten." The utter expressionlessness of Keith's voice repeating this last phrase, underlined it as that which had rankled worst. "This is the joy-ride? Quite."

"Keith—"

"Nowadays," concluded the young engineer, pronouncing this overworked word with as much bitterness as if he were any dean of sixty, "Nowadays a man's rival is not some other man after his girl; it's some other life that the girl herself is after. Right. I won't bother you any more. I'm off. I shall dig out that young fellow, get him to motor me back to Boulogne now, and see what boats are crossing to-night."

Melody, stunned, saw pictures rise, blotting out those rows of faces in the show tent's murk and glare. Pictures of Dover's dear white cliffs; English hop fields seen to right and left of the train, through a waving scarf of steam. Smiling, blessedly usual, unemotional crowd surging up to the barrier to meet the train at Victoria. Keith, tall and burnt as brown as his suitcase, catching up his traps, hailing some good-natured Cockney porter, legging it off to his mother, to Bill Wynne, to his other pals . . . and inevitably, presently, to another girl.

The pictures flicked out as Keith said: "Good night, Melody. Good-bye, and the best of luck."

The best of luck? Meaning Melody right out of his life, out of what she now only too poignantly realized would have been the joy-ride of all.

Stunned, Melody vacillated for one second only. Which was she to do? Pull herself together for the appropriate light-hearted casual, "Well, give my love to everybody, and *bon voyage*, old thing?" Or cry, "Listen! This is all a ghastly mistake! Dash this show. *Damn* the show. You're completely out, my dear: I've come to my senses all right; I only want to come with *you*, Keith!" Of course. Lover's misunderstandings are no more worn, nowadays, than flannel petticoats. As for messing up two perfectly good lives with them—ah, pah! She turned. Her vermilioned lips opened to say, "I only want—"

It was here that Fate interrupted. Fate wrapped in shawls, Fate with dusty grey hair, scissors-sharp eyes, an angry, seeking face and a high-pitched screech of "Mélodie! Mélodie—"

"Good Lord, another of them," thought the disgusted Keith. It was the crone who'd been selling tickets and munching winkles at the entrance.

"Just Heavens, Mélodie, why have you not brought up the collection for the artistes?" Grimy claws seized upon the collecting saucer. "It's all—this? And why are you not already dressed for the act with the Vagabonds?" scolded Madame Platt. "Monsieur will pardon me, but I cannot permit him any longer to remain delaying my *artistes*. The representation, *vous savez*, the representation—Dispatch yourself. Melody, quick, quick,

quick, quick, quick, quick, quick! The second time to-day that the girl makes me these histories. Go!"

Already Melody was a mere disappearing gleam behind backs of the mob, of white silk shoulders and golden-brown Bun.

III

Keith then fully realized the unromantic fact that he was starving.

That wisiki-soda and biscuit had been pressed upon him by Teddy at six o'clock. It was now quite half past ten. With difficulty the young man elbowed a way out of that congested show-tent, past the box office, the cluster of idlers gaping about the caravans, past the naphtha flares and across the market square.

"That's better," sighed Keith, lifting his eyes to the stars, breathing in cool, sea-scented night-air. He crossed to the café, sat down at a table outside; there came up an aproned but collarless waiter. Keith ordered food, any food! Sausage and bread, a salad, anything! Ordered for himself a much-needed drink. He ate and drank, wearily stretching out long legs in front of him, and for some moments was conscious of nothing but satisfying ravenous hunger.

Presently he found himself staring over the Square, watching that dark fleet of caravans, the splashes of light, that long vast Chinese lantern, dimly rosily aglow, which was the show-tent of the Theatre Platt.

Grotesque circus! . . . What a life for a girl; hustled by that old hag who looked like a cleaning-woman, going round for sous from fisher-folk . . . but the life Melody preferred to Keith. Blackest reaction took him, as he

mused. What, after all, had he to offer the girl? Life on the one hand without the super-luxury to which Now-girls have raised the standard of comfort. On the other hand, without any amusing unconventionality to transform it into Melody's characteristic joy-ride. It wasn't much. With the curious, usually-unappreciated modesty of your physically attractive Englishman, Keith did not count himself, his looks, his attraction, as weighing in the balance. He merely thought, "Six hundred a year; not more for years yet. No car but another Aero-Morgan. Three months of the year trekking about in India perhaps. Nine months at home. Some girls would like that all right."

Not Melody. Not Keith's lovely vagabond, who had told him to his face she preferred joy-riding as one of the chorus. Seemed to like anything better than him. Yes, that was what it amounted to, that was the climax of Keith's waiting, his longing, his resolution, his journeying in pursuit. To find Melody here, acclimatized to squalid, tawdry, colourful surroundings which she put before any home.

From the Show-tent, floated across the Square the tinny tinkle of that piano. Overture to Part Two? Well, as far as Keith was concerned, it had been the end of the show . . . any and every show. . . .

IV

The sound of a sudden commotion it was that shook the young Englishman out of down-hearted broodings over his glass of hot black coffee and his cigarette; the sound of a jingling crash.

Up one of the cobbled alleys between houses on the right, there had dashed someone on a bicycle, which he flung down at the side of the pavement close to Keith's table. The cyclist was a slim-built fisherman, or at least a man in fisherman's garments, who shouted loudly and peremptorily for a *fine*.

The waiter who brought the drink addressed him familiarly. Keith, glancing carelessly across the table, saw in the light pouring from the café window that the fellow was hatchet-faced, pale, and dishevelled, and that the brandy was not his first that evening.

"At last you arrive?" the waiter was saying, though Keith's French was not equal to following the rapid flow. "The comrades of the troupe were in all the states about you. Your father, my faith! And your *maman*, who wept, fearing you drowned!"

Some indistinct growl from the other man.

"You would do well," gabbled the waiter confidentially, "to hasten, if it is your intention to play to-night this famous scene in the Thieves' Kitchen. Listen! The piano has stopped. Already the first interval is over. They are going to put into your part of the Apache that fellow who looks after the horse. I heard that. The Management gave you up when there arrived home without you that young lady, that English *artiste*, that so-pretty Mademoiselle—"

At his table Keith Cartwright pricked up his ears. Had he caught a well-known name?

"She, for example!" broke with a savage oath from this other man. "You're right. It is for her I come back, expressly! I have something not-too-amiable to tell this

Mélodie—" With something else for which Keith's French was again insufficient, but it was enough that he suspected the fellow had mentioned that name.

Very quickly Keith was on his feet.

Equally rapidly, however, the other fellow had betaken himself off. Rapidly, slinkily, furtively, as a black cat might move, he had sped across the market square; he had taken his way towards the splashes of naphtha-light and the dark fleet of caravans. Had disappeared—breathing, meanwhile, threats and vengeance at which Keith could not guess. . . .

V

All the way back from Hardelot, with his face set into an ugly mask, the Apache had thought out the insults with which he meant to bespatter Melody, and before the direction, before the whole company! This, she should find, was not the way in which a mere Girl Anglaise was to be allowed to treat a French artist of temperament and distinction (for thus he saw himself!). Had it not been infamous, her behaviour? Listen, all! (All should listen.) Had she not made a *rendez-vous* with him, arranged with him for a promenade à *deaux* to Hardelot? Had she not encouraged him to make love to her? Taken his kisses? And gladly, my faith! Gladly. Of that there was no mistake. She had amorously taken his kisses, and then, at first sight of one of these sacred *sportif* Englishmen on the beach, she had turned from him, André Tous-saint, as though he had been a leper. With that Englishman she had rushed back in the aerophage, leaving him, André Toussaint, planted there. On the sands at Harde-

lot. Like a post. Like the wrecked submarine. Like that. She had sped back to the theatre, caring nothing if he, André Toussaint, arrived in time, caring nothing if he arrived late, caring nothing if he never arrived. Ah, for example! And after having willingly made Love with him (for that was how he now put it to himself). She should regret that. Very bitterly she should regret it. First he would go through his part on the stage (and magnificently! To show her!) And then, before the Platts, before her friends the Rénés, before all the comrades of the troupe, he, André Toussaint, would blaze abroad all the histories of this afternoon, and would tell this Melody, without any *détours*, exactly what she was.

Breathing brandy, threats, and vengeance, he slipped into his van.

VI

Keith, not guessing at the histories of this afternoon, felt certain he had caught the name of Melody . . .

He called the waiter; asked in his uncertain French, "Who was that fellow, the man just now, with the bicycle, who had ordered a *fine*?"

The aproned collarless waiter told him confidentially that it was one of the theatrical troupe from over there. Toussaint, his name was. The younger Toussaint. As an artist, admirable; an Apache he played, ah, for example! Superb. But as character, less estimable. A fellow worth nothing, if Monsieur understood? *Merci, monsieur.*

Having tipped the waiter, Keith grabbed up that old hat of his and, warned by some queer instinct that he

had got to keep his eye on that fellow, he legged it over the market square and back to the show-tent.

CHAPTER XIX

CURTAIN

*About a scene behind the scenes;
and about what might have been
the unrehearsed curtain to a drama*

I

HOWEVER, before Keith could make his way back into the audience, there was to be further maddening delay. (Day of delay for the poor fellow!) At the receipt of custom it was represented to him that the English monsieur (looked upon as good for another ticket) must not be pushed into the back of the tent among all those fishers. Ah, but no! A place could be found for Monsieur in the front row. "Fetch, Henri, a chair."

The ragamuffin Platt grandson scampered off to find a chair from some regions at the back, while Keith stood grinding his heel into the mud at the entrance, and, incidentally, missing more of the play. Missing the entrance of Mariette as the consumptive Vagabond, a performance which was the pride of her father René's life, so death-stricken in this part appeared the wholesomely-tanned face of his youngest child, so mortally scared her bearing, so convincing her churchyard-cough.

Keith waited.

"No chair? What, no chair to be found? Ah, but sooner than that monsieur should not have a chair"

(sooner than that Madame Platt should not garner an extra five francs) "let monsieur take this—" And the kitchen chair of the box-office on which she had been sitting was dragged from under her, handed over the kitchen table, pressed into the hands of Henri, and anon squeezed at the end of the first row of *fauteuils*. Keith, ushered to this seat by Henri (clutching his sous), found himself with his left shoulder clamped against a fat French shop-keeper in an alpaca jacket. Keith's chin was practically resting on the stout back of Madame Heynal, the pianist, while she and her piano were, in turn, well-nigh pushed on to the very stage.

Here, almost close enough to be touched, there was in progress the scene of the Thieves' Kitchen. Ruffians of the Paris Underworld (among them old Monsieur Platt himself) drank deep from black bottles, and in conspiratorial mutters plotted the assassination of René, Melody's stage-husband. Melody was not on in this scene, but instantly Keith spotted that fellow at the café just now. Yes, there he was all right; he was that slight dark-clad form lurking at the back of the stage, a mere glimpse of hatchet-profile showing between the peak of his cap and the blood-red scarf knotted under his chin . . . Now André Toussaint, who had sought to fortify himself in his father's manner, would probably end up as his father was ending up. He was, however, still at the stage when a few extra brandies made no difference to his stage-performance, except perhaps to improve it. To-night he went through at the top of his form that minute-and-a-half's pantomime that got the house into such pleasurable shudders. Never before had he given such a savagely

sideward glance from under his cap, or slouched so sinisterwise behind the victim, to wait—tiger before the spring. Lightning-swift he got that blood-red scarf unknotted, whisked from about his throat; he sprang! had that scarf whipped as a gag over his victim's mouth, while "Ahs" of rapturous horror broke from people in all the seats about Keith.

Oh, it was a finished performance, that of Toussaint *fil's*, made up by Nature as well as Art to represent a Danger to Society.

"A very nasty piece of work, that fellow," thought Keith, steadily watching him from the end of the front row, and fuming, fuming to think that such a one should be playing in a troupe with his golden girl, even on Christian-name terms, perhaps, with Melody.

II

Meanwhile what about Melody?

On the rose-red oblong of her curtained van window she appeared as the moving blue shadow of a perfect arm, stretching out, drawing back, stretching out . . . Come in and see her as she stands, scantily-clad and flawless under the van's unshaded electric light; stands, for in that cramped space she does not have to take a step, everything is within reach of that outstretched arm. She stood, caged in by walls, her bed, her dressing-table.

She had to change into a dress much admired by the troupe as "that so-elegant evening-toilette of Mélodie"; actually it was our old friend the cheap pink Shaftesbury Avenue georgette in which she had danced at the birthday party on her last night in Paris. To-night it was to grace

the melodrama's finale, "that so-pretty death-scene" where the consumptive Vagabond, having been mortally wounded by the Apache, had to sob out his last breath on the bosom of his adopted mother, Melody.

Melody, as she pulled the gown over her head, was herself feeling like murder; not of the Apache, but of her directrix, Madame Platt. "That horrible old woman," fumed her leading lady. "That Arabesque in low life. Butting in like that, just at that moment." Yes, at that precise moment when Melody had been going to explain to Keith. Now it was too late. Keith would be off. Crossing to-night. She fumed, pulling out the georgette wisp over her satin slip. No getting hold of Keith. So extraordinary to think that up to now there had never been any idea except on the part of Keith, *his* getting hold of *her* . . . And now, now . . . What time does the Bureau des Postes open to-morrow? Have to wire to him . . . Yes, but where! *Where?* she fretted impatiently, as she tightened the gilt hairpins in her Bun—and a swift thought shot like a gold thread across the dark impatient web of her thoughts: "Someone said that '*With short hair for women, love-making has lost a gesture.*' But I should be able to take down all my miles of hair for Keith! And the *companion* he'd be! Us two in the little Aero-Morgan, streaking along the North Road . . . Oh, and *meals* with Keith, all private and jolly and *own!* Keith would be so—so—so—"—the odd word came to her—"so *comfortable* as a husband!"

It felt as if some shameless stranger were using Melody's mind to go on thinking of Keith as a husband, but never mind that . . . where could she wire to the man?

He had given up his old rooms near Victoria when he went out to India. Then he would probably go straight up to Hampstead to Mrs. Cartwright's flat. Yes, he would be with his mother, and at that thought, Melody for the first time was conscious of a stab of obsolete reserve, reluctance. "Can't wire to him at his mother's. I know she always knew what was happening about him and me. Mothers are like that; it's awful. What am I to do? How am I going to get him back?" A plan occurred to her as she re-powdered her neck. Now her neck, rounded, long and full, was honeysuckle fair, indeed one of Melody's more seductive charms. Her throat melted without a collarbone ripple into the slope of her breast; behind it showed that baby's-nape into which her long tresses faded as golden down. If ever a neck was created for kisses it was that of Melody—who had forgotten those kisses of this afternoon as though they had never been. What she remembered was that this cherished make-up powder puff which she was using (mellowed and yellowed by continual service, its handle a tiny porcelain negro slave known as Abdulla) had been a mascot to her two tours ago from her brother Bill. Of course. She could wire to Bill at his office—

"Get hold of Keith and send him back at once to me.
(Signed) Pug-Face."

These nursery nick-names make up in emotional appeal what they lack in beauty *per se*. Her favourite brother would understand and get busy . . .

The wire ought to arrive by ten.

"And suppose Bill weren't at the office? . . . And

were off to play Pont de Briques before twelve o'clock to-morrow, and how, *how* am I to bear any more of this being hung up?"

Her fingers were clumsy with agitation as she unfolded her scarf, a pseudo-Oriental sequined atrocity which had been pressed upon her by Nanette, who considered that this touch completed the death-scene toilette, making it "More dressed, *tu sais?* More *maman!*" As Melody veiled with it the perfection of her young shoulders and upper arms, she trembled and shook; she, who in this matter of Love had been so much like her own brother Bill, that is to say, "like an April day, smiling and cold and gay, a temperate lily, temperate as fair." Heaven knows there would have been that "warmer June" for Keith, but—

Here something more devastating occurred to the mind of Melody.

Could one blame Keith if after all this he was put off? Put off completely and for keeps? For ages he had been passionately in love with Melody. But no man, not the most devoted, will continue to provide that devotion for ever and ever and ever in the face of everything with which Keith had had to put up. And supposing meeting her here to-night had been the last straw? There was that possibility. There was! Had not Keith said "All right" in the tone of absolute finality? Panic clutched Melody, the worst panic a woman knows, the bitterest fear, that horror of finding that love on which she counted as unshakably her own, has been taken from her, never to be recovered. The emotions of Mademoiselle were a slow fuse, as the absinthe-sodden fakir had said. That

fuse was on fire now, but what was the good of it all, supposing she had discovered too late that Keith was the man of her life?

At this thought the girl's heart turned to ice in her breast. And, "Life" summed up the despairing Melody, "is the utter limit."

Tinkling music sounded across from the show tent. Whatever happened in real life, this mountebank drama waited to be played out to a finish, it was indeed almost time for the death-scene.

She who was now in Reality's grip must forget herself, must lend face and form, voice and gesture, to un-reality. "Dash. Damn. '*On with the Motley*,'" quoted young Melody with intense bitterness as she turned. She must now dash out and across—only a step—and a step-ladder—to the screened-off loft-like space behind the stage-wings of the Theatre Platt.

Here, in that dim draughty place of boards, dirty screens and numbered slats, to the right the table with the oil lamp, to the left the stool with the prompter's book—here, in the uncertain light and the atmosphere of oil, sawdust, damp wood, grease-paint and humanity, there was to be played a scene quite unexpected, unrehearsed, and not in any play in the Platt repertory.

III

Melody, as she appeared up the step-ladder, found the stage being set for the so-called luxurious drawing-room of "her" house in Paris. The red plush furniture of it was being shifted about by René, by old Monsieur Platt, still in the villainous Thieves' Kitchen make-up, which

indeed merely emphasized his natural type, and by André Toussaint as the Apache.

Ah, then he had got back? His back was to Melody and he and René between them were moving to the centre of the stage, behind the drawn curtain, the hard-worked sofa which would presently represent the Vagabond's death-bed.

Both Vagabonds were standing, waiting and ready. As Melody appeared the flappers turned, exclaimed and skipped up to her. Ah, that was one gleam of comfort at all events. . . . Obviously they had forgotten the cloud which had hung over the beginning of this performance. They were once more matey and jolly. Little Mariette (Fauntleroy-suited and with a smile and manner in pleasant contrast to her corpse-like make-up) caught her friend by the arm, and at once betrayed that it was not only the approach of the fattest scene in all this fat rôle that stimulated her but a newer, more delightful thrill.

"Mélodie! Tell us. Thy gentleman friend—"

"To whom thou wert speaking during the entr'acte—"

"It was he? The admirer?"

"The well-beloved?"

"The English monsieur who was in India, he has returned? It is he?"

"In effect it was he," admitted Melody ruefully, and at the sound of her voice André Toussaint lifted his dark head. So there she was? Up to now she had eluded him, the perfidious seductive one. She had evaded, escaped any word or look from the man she had left in the lurch. *Bien!* His moment was approaching when he could fling over her the vitriol of his abuse. (That,

ladies, is the seamy side of the Latin lover's fluent love-making.) There she was, making a soft radiance of gold and pink in the dingy barrack. She did not look at André. She knew better, but her time was coming. She was talking to the *gosses*. And about what? He pricked up his ears. They caught Melody's—"He has gone now."

"What? But—"

"He could not wait for the end of the performance, Pierrette."

"Who? Thy English gentleman friend? But he is still there."

"And so handsome, Mélodie, and so blonde, and so well-dressed, your Beloved—"

"Certainly he's there!"

"What? What are you saying?" exclaimed Melody, and, suddenly very still, the Apache listened. What was this talk of a man? A lover? Of Melody's?

For hours now there had smouldered in young Tous-saint the resentment of this afternoon's frustration. That, and the humiliation of his being left planted there, working with this evening's brandies, reached a climax in to-night's discovery. The coveted girl had a lover. It was known? Even to the brat Mariette? Then *that* was why she had made a laughing stock of André Toussaint? Therefore she had left him planted there on the sands? Therefore she had flown, on the wings of an aerophage to the lover of whose coming she had heard from these other sacred Englishmen, his friends? So that was it? He saw it all, now, and, still as the tiger crouched to spring, he listened to Melody's excited, "What do you mean, Pierrette? Where is he?"

"But in front, Mélodie! We saw him, Mariette and I. Just this moment. We peeped. Monsieur is in the first row. Go and regard, Mélodie. Go, go, go!"

André Toussaint, that man foreseen to be dangerous to Melody, took his long hands from the end of the sofa and made one step aside, waiting. Would she? She would dare? Would the jade have the audacity under his own eyes to go to the side of the curtain and to signal to her lover in the audience?

What followed was a matter of seconds.

Swiftly Melody legged it across the darkened stage to the curtain that hung swaying, shutting out the house with its row after diminishing row of faces dimmed by cigarette haze. She reached the division where curtain met slat.

IV

From in front people were accustomed during the interval to see thrust out the head of one or another of the troupe, who would smile, exchanging greeting and gesture with the spectators. Already there had appeared the kindly placid face of Madame Nanette, nodding acknowledgment and thanks for a bag full of fresh vegetables, which had been the bouquet of some friend in front. Later on they had seen the bright excited little faces of both Vagabonds thrust forth and withdrawn; and now the dirty canvas parted again to show, leaning out, forward, like some ship's charming figurehead, the shoulders, the burnished hair dressed to look in front like a successful Eton crop, and the admired blonde features of the Vagabond's stage *maman*.

Melody's wide sweet stare swept the front row. Was

he? Could he be— Yes, it was not too good to be true. He was there. Just across Madame Heynal's piano, across her fat shoulder, crowded between a French visitor and the canvas wall, there he sat. Still there. Keith.

In a daze of rapture, that was all she realized. She did not know that the Apache, creeping up behind her, had glanced over her shoulder and had also seen.

Keith was so close that Melody, in spite of the gabbling house, did not have to raise her voice as she uttered his name.

"Keith!"

In a second the big graceful young Englishman was on his feet. "Oh, You!" sang a small exultant voice in Melody's heart. "As if there could have been any misunderstanding as soon as we *saw*—"

"Melody!"

Gazing down, she caught the look in his eyes. A small excited ripple of laughter broke her voice as she spoke. "I say, Keith! Don't go until I've seen you, will you? I've a word to say to you after the show."

That was what Melody had meant to say. She got as far as "I say, Keith—" The rest of it died on her parted lips. Gold and pink figurehead disappeared from the sight of the house.

A long hand gripping her by the shoulder had dragged her back.

v

A matter of seconds . . .

She had gone too far. The Apache had seen her signal to his rival; had caught sight of that blonde imbecile, like to all the other English as sheep resembles sheep. For

hours those dark impulses had smouldered, smouldered . . . They blazed! Not enough to fling a vitriol of words over the woman, denouncing her before the company for what she was. Not enough! At the sound of the soft broken laugh with which Melody had called her Englishman's name, the Apache saw red. Out went the long hand to grip her shoulder. Like a puppet he pulled her back, while another fiercer impulse flamed up within him and roared. *Mélodie*, so false and so seductive, so pink and gold and desirable, she who inflamed a man's senses and then tossed him aside to laugh softly for another man, she should be left so that no man should want even to set eyes on her more. Savagely he muttered, "Thou diest!"

For he saw red. Blood-red like the Apache scarf which he now for the second time to-night unknotted lightning-swift, whisking it as a gag over the mouth of his victim. Melody, who had been utterly taken off her guard, came to herself and tried to cry out as she struggled against the left encircling arm of the Apache. He with his right hand was seeking to get that scarf about the honeysuckle-fair sappy neck of the English girl, to twist that scarf tight, tight, and with that scarf to choke the life and the beauty out of her. Desperately Melody tore at that scarf. A matter of seconds . . .

Réné, suddenly seeing, made a dash for Toussaint. A backward savage kick got Réné on the knee, laming, bringing him down to the boards. Simultaneously old Monsieur Platt seized the lamp, would have hurled it; slipping from his hands it smashed harmlessly at his feet. Mariette and Pierrette, clutching each other, hid

their eyes against each other's shoulders, screaming, "He will strangle her! Help! He is killing *Mélodie*. Help!"

Help was at hand, but without a second to spare.

Keith Cartwright, just below the stage, had seen that man's hand shoot out to grip his *Melody's* shoulder, had heard the screams. In a stride Keith was up the step-ladder at the side of the stage, had forced his way between canvas curtain and rocking screens, was on the stage confronting the scene of the very horrible struggle. On the floor writhed *Réné*, cursing, frantically trying to grab at the ankles of the Apache. Old Platt stood helpless, doddering, gibbering, his daubed *Voltaire* face a mask of terror framed in wild grey locks. From the wings sounded a clatter of feet, the alarmed voices crying, "What is it? What is happening?" of those who in another moment would have come too late to avert catastrophe—*Heynal* the baritone, *Nanette*, the younger Platt, the *Toussaint* parents. Shrinking against the screen, the two boy-clad girls shrieked in each other's arms, while the Apache, with mad eyes, mad hands, gripped *Melody*. Bent sideways across his arm, her hands to the blood-red scarf at her throat, she jerked her head this way and that . . . the Bun had caught on a nail of the wings, down over her back and shoulders tumbled all her hair, it waved like a storm-shaken gold banner to the boards. That rickety stage shook and resounded to the straining scuffle of feet, for wildly, desperately, frantically she was fighting for life, she who had always been in love with life, *Melody* the joy-rider, so young, so lovely, so vital and gay . . . Mad-eyed, the Apache was mastering her. Another moment and that

mock murder of the melodrama must have given place to real murder behind the curtain that shut out the audience—"the so-pretty death-scene" would have been Death itself.

Picture Keith Cartwright's forward spring! The leap as of some big light-coloured dog, unleashed, to fling himself upon the assassin! Out went Keith's straight left, and crashed between the mad black eyes of the Apache.

Melody, loosed from his grip, dropped like a shot bird into the arms of Keith.

CHAPTER XX

SCENE-SHIFTING

*About a stage-wedding which you may
not have expected; about a leave-taking;
and about what is "up to" men*

I

NEXT day was to be a succession of shifting scenes—though not perhaps the scenes that you might have expected, after what had happened towards the end of the Theatre Platt's last performance in La Falaise. Had not the show-tent nearly witnessed a murder . . . even, two murders?

Being British, the first impulse of Keith Cartwright had been to raise heaven and earth, instantly to inform our Consulate of the attempted murder of a British subject, and to set in motion the whole machinery of our Embassy in France.

Being Continentals, the Toussaint parents (*"in all the*

states") were all for immediately arresting this English assassin who had felled their André senseless to the earth. Police! A process! Justice! Law of the French Republic . . .

But actually none of this came to pass.

When La Falaise's local policemen elbowed their way, through the agitated crowd that was crying havoc, into the theatre to ask what was this disturbance, my God? What had passed, what had arrived, and who was it that was killed? This young lady? No? She was recovering? Ah? It was Monsieur l'artiste who was killed . . . Wait, wait . . . attend only an instant, ladies and gentlemen, if you please! Now what was this . . ." (It all looked, as you might imagine, like a painting of The Day of Judgment rendered by some ultracubist; it sounded like some modern composer's "Symphony Based on Noises of a Railway Terminus" . . .) When at last, out of the chorus of imprecations, exclamations, asseverations, and contradictory explanations in English, French, and Keith's French, the agents had extracted a rough working knowledge of this double assault in the theatre, they collected also the information there would be no prosecution from either side. The second thoughts of Toussaints (and Platts) warned them it would be as well to keep out of the newspapers any mention of such disturbances, while Keith Cartwright simultaneously realized the same fact. (To be summed up later by Nanette thus: "It is not over the account of a *crime passionel* and farces of that sort that a gentleman wishes to see published the portrait of the young-girl-of-decent-family who is to become his wife.")

Thus, after threats on both sides of further hearing, after much parrot-housing, fetching of iodine, bandages, rendering of first aid by Madame Nanette, and loud weeping from Madame Toussaint, the horrifying incident was at last closed.

Upon that caravan square which had resembled nothing so much as a poultry yard to which the fox pays a nocturnal visit, there descended, at long last, peace.

II

Early next morning, scenes . . .

Scene with the Platts.

This *Mélodie*, this Girl Anglaise, she who had brought nothing but misfortune, she who had made all those histories last night, causing these riots, causing police, for the first time in the Platts' management, to be fetched into their tent, and ruining the play's last scene, ruining the pretty death-scene of the Vagabond for which the *maman* could not appear, so that Monsieur Platt himself had been obliged to take the book and to read the part while the Vagabond had to expire on the mere sofa back instead of on the mother's bosom; this same Melody was now going to leave them standing, precisely as Mademoiselle Monteux had done, planted there.

There were fashions! Ah, but no. Ah, but it could not be allowed. It was not thus that one treated a solid management. There was the contract, Mademoiselle. The contract, Monsieur!

Keith Cartwright, fresh, rested and groomed as an English tennis-lawn, had turned up bright and early in

the midst of this chaos of dismantlement, to see his Melody through.

Melody, only a little pale after last night's narrow escape, only a little subdued under a strange radiance, did not seem to be equal to translating Keith's summings-up of what he thought of the Management Platt. Madame Platt, that gesticulating scarecrow, found great difficulty in Keith's French, until the moment he said the English word "compensation," and produced from his pocket book a clean English ten-pound note.

Whereupon Platt fury subsided like storm-waves under oil. Ten *livres Anglaises* . . . fifteen hundred francs. That was something. (It was at least five hundred francs more than even Madame Platt had intended to demand.) Her talons closed on the note, folded it, stowed it into a case that was slipped under folds of shawl, stuff, and tricot, to its lurking place under the busks of a corset best left unimagined.

"Good luck then, Mélodie. Thou wilt be missed in the troupe, but to-day I send for the young daughter of my niece from Berck to take thy place. Good luck; and to Monsieur!" A talon-shake to each.

"And that," said Keith relieved, "is that."

III

More early morning scenes of show moving.

Busily the troupe were packing their belongings.

No more show-tent, it was now yard upon square yard of dirty grey canvas laid out to be folded across and across. Stacks of folded chairs . . . stacks of scenery,

more pitiful than ever in sunlight . . . All the village seemed to have turned out to watch the dismantling. On the outskirts of these activities the visitors hovered watching, bringing last offerings of fish or garments, taking farewell. The youngest artistes were embraced by local shopkeepers with a show of tenderest affection, with cross-over kisses. The tractor that dragged the vans would make three journeys between market square of La Falaise and wayside common of Pont de Briques. But before mid-day nothing would be left here of the Travelling Show but its aftermath of litter, vegetable refuse, empty bottles, torn posters, old handbills . . . memories.

IV

At mid-day, scene of a stage wedding, a private wedding at La Falaise.

To you ladies who have been kind enough to follow this vagrant story so far, I will give three guesses whose wedding came now . . . No, but you would not guess.

It was the wedding of Monsieur René, the Theatre Platt's temperamental tenor (who in 1906 had sung at *le* Covent Garden, who had more than two hundred rôles, including that of "The Two Orphans," "Miss Helyett," "The Lyons' Mail," "The Grand Mogul," and "The Daughter of Madame Angot," who had travelled "making" every town you could mention—Constantinople, Saigon, Algiers, Port Said; who often yearned aloud and bitterly for his time over again so that instead of the stage, which is a job for youth, he could choose the better part and continue his studies of medicine, but who ac-

tually would have died of monotony had he quitted the dear, variegated and uncertain Profession.)

Yes, it was the wedding of René with Madame Nanette, that serene domesticated motherly Juno who ceaselessly and sincerely hankered after some comfortable thriving little grocery business, but who was indifferent whether she sang in operetta or acted in melodrama, whether she was arrayed in the green velvet riding habit with the plumed hat, wig, and switch of the equestrienne in the "*Mountebanks*," or whether she trailed the white robes of the Mother Superior in "*The Cavaliers in the Convent*," provided she could follow the fortunes of the man she loved, could look after his creature-comforts, could see that he neither took cold, hurt his knee-cap, forgot his hat in the café, nor got run over by a tram, provided she could make of his travelling caravan or his furnished apartments in this or that town where they toured, his comfortable home.

This she had done for the last seventeen checkered years; to-day they were to be married. Yes. I thought you would be surprised, even as Melody Wynne was surprised. From that friend and protégée they had kept, until this morning, the secret of their wedding, which had been arranged to take place at the Mairie in La Falaise, as soon as that long Barnum-show-like procession of the Theatre Platt had wound its way off, along the dusty road, to its next pitch.

Give it one last glance?

Out of the end window of the last van peeped two bright, excited girlish faces, those of the two little vagabonds, Mariette and Pierrette. Beaming, waving, they

called shrilly: "Adieu, Mélodie! Adieu, monsieur! Good luck! *Au revoir, maman!*" And they threw kisses to the bridal party left standing outside the café of the Market Square. "A happy wedding!"

For those girls were not to be present at the wedding.

"Me, I saw no reason why not?" protested their father, who for this ceremony had dressed himself in his well-brushed Charleston *complet* of cornflower blue serge, with a pink silk shirt out of his theatre-wardrobe, a crimson aster in his buttonhole and a straw hat with a brown band over his newly-inked hair. "They should have come; a pretty little diversion for the *gosses* who have played so well in this place, to attend for the last day in this place the marriage of their *papa* and their *maman*."

"If thou thinkest that at the wedding of parents it is appropriate to find well-brought-up daughters of twelve and sixteen years old, I," declared Nanette good-humouredly, "am not of thy opinion."

"Me, as a bridegroom, I find that to produce two nearly grown-up daughters as witnesses to one's wedding, would be a good joke!" (*rigolo*) "*N'est ce pas, Mélodie?*"

"Me, as a bride, I find the sense of humour of men other than mine. Thou art thyself nothing but a school-boy, René. But for Monsieur the mayor to look at me with eyes big as of a fish, in disapproval, when for seventeen years I have been all that is most respectable both as a wife and as a mother, is not," declared Nanette, smiling but firm, "my idea of The *Rigolo*."

She was quite shocked that Melody should have made the possibly natural mistake she had made, and that she should have at first concluded there had ever been any

Breath of the Irregular in this ménage of an affectionate well-assorted couple with two bonny daughters.

"What? But! Naturally, we are already *married*," explained Madame Nanette, opening candid blameless blue eyes under that lurid little red hat which, with her overcoat of huge black-and-white checks, her white beach-frock and her high-heeled boots of white kid, represented her bridal attire. "Married? But I ask you! Seventeen years ago. All my papers will show thee that we were married. Only, in Belgium; because of the divorce of René, from Madame his first wife who left him for this Italian gentleman" (this also was a surprise packet to Melody) "and because of the tiresome business to do with René's eldest son, whom he has not seen for fifteen years." Legally and respectably married as far as Belgium and the world at large were concerned, it appeared that the Rénés had not been yet legitimately wed according to French law. Now, however, having wound up the business with René's eldest son, now on this first free day, and with the two young daughters out of the way and left to settle in at the next stand, this little matter could be regularized.

As witnesses and wedding guests they had Melody Wynne and Mr. Keith Cartwright.

Even for that short ceremony Melody found it difficult to keep her thoughts away from the next wedding that she (probably?) would attend. Would they make a success of it, she and Keith? Astounding things can happen in that line; people you would have sworn would get on together like blades of a pair of scissors are to be found only a few years later on without a thought in common

except how to remain apart. Other people whose association you would think could bring nothing but the introduction of tornadoes into the home are found so contentedly united they might be a couple of peaceful spinsters living in amity. Not that one would envy that sort of existence for one's self and Keith . . . but a week's sky-high happiness with Keith would be a bargain, Melody thought, if bought by the rest of life's becoming pedestrian. . . . Since yesterday she knew that! . . . Could the Power that had taught them how to draw teach them how to keep each other? How, for instance, had these Rénés managed?

"Nanette," she heard the tenor's distracted whisper, "Monsieur the maire demands that certificate which I lost—Ah! thou hast it there? Good."

V

Scene of a cheery wedding breakfast in Boulogne! The hotel's best *déjeuner* was offered by Keith Cartwright to the bridal pair, who now in the sight of French law were man and wife. Hand in hand sat the Rénés—though to be sure this was no new attitude for them! Melody and Keith sat opposite, avoiding, in the English fashion, each other's eyes . . .

"Mélodie, see that thou drinkest the last glass of champagne in the bottle, since it signifies thy marriage this year."

"Fortunate," added René sentimentally, "he who is to become the husband of our Mélodie!"

"That is no news, grand Imbecile," Nanette pointed out affectionately, "to Monsieur her fiancé."

A word that made Melody lift her burnished head on that honeysuckle-fair throat, and exclaim hastily: "Error! Monsieur is not my fiancé—"

Neither of the Rénés believed her, even before young Keith laughed aloud, explaining in his French that the error had been made by Mademoiselle.

Scene (suddenly a heart-catching little scene!) of farewell to the Rénés; golden-hearted penniless French strollers who had made, of this dancer from another class and country, their younger sister. Over now, that gay intimate, transient association! Melody with her Keith was taking the next boat across to England; her friends were catching the afternoon bus to Pont de Briques. It waited before Boulogne Post Office.

"Here, where we first met, we leave thee. May the Virgin protect thee, Mélodie!" exclaimed René, while tears coursed down that mobile, temperamental clean-cut face. "Take this, my *Fatma*, to bring luck!" He tore, from a flimsy Algerian bracelet of near-gold that he wore, the mascot of a hand. "May the Saints keep thee!"

"And for thy laundry that was not yet ready," concluded Nanette, holding her in a last embrace to the black-and-white check bosom, "I send it to that address thou gavest the *gosses*? '*Lilas*'—and all that? . . . *Adieu, ma fille*; we leave thee in good hands!"

VI

Scene of young Love, standing under an arch of stone, golden, mossy, and mellowed, set high up in Old Boulogne.

Behind the lovers rose the broad empty tree-shaded

cobbled street to the fortifications; before them that street dropped down, down, to the town's roofs, the long wharf, the shipping, and the blue stretch of Harbour. It was to put in the time of waiting for the five o'clock boat that Keith and Melody had climbed up past the grey Cathedral to this more deserted part of the town. All that morning (what with contract-breaking, packing up, marriage witnessing, and wedding breakfasting) those English lovers had scarcely addressed one word to each other.

Yet all seemed already said, all was in perfect accord even before (turning to his Melody under that arch which curved its shadow like a huge blue protective arm about the lovers) Keith said simply, "It's the dickens of a number of years, dearest, since I've adored you."

It took her breath for a moment. "Adored, did I hear you say '*adored*'?" she laughed, half bold, half shy, this word which all women covet; a word not often affected (she thought) by a girl's brother's friends. Yet here was Keith pronouncing it in all unselfconsciousness, and, further! in your any-nice-Englishman-to-any-wounded-setter tone! It took Melody's breath—that and the look of him, the nearness of him.

"I said '*adored*.'"

"Then why—why—"

"What?"

"Why couldn't you ever write it?"

"Yes. I suppose they were utterly dud letters—"

"Weren't!" Melody contradicted him fiercely. "It was I who was a fool not to *like* them like that. They were you. They were about what you were doing. They gave you to me if I'd had the sense to see that, instead of sulk-

ing because there was nothing in them about what you thought about me!"

"Own sweetheart, I can make up arrears for that now, if I'm let," said Keith Cartwright, who, getting the idea late, had however got it now, since he, in last night's hideous alarm, had with the same blow shattered inhibition. "Girl, girl! I'll tell you everything I've ever had the nerve to think about you before I'm done, but if that takes even more years it's only because there's such a dickens of a lot of it," he told her, laughing quite foolishly with happiness in the shelter of arching blue shadow that cut the dappling sunlight of the Avenue. "Oh, Melody, by the way, I'm crazy about even your name; great pull to a girl to have a pretty Christian name, Miss Wynne. If we ever had a little girl. . . . By the way, you won't mind having babies—"

"Shouldn't think so! There was a pet of a one in the village called Marie Thérèse, bulgy pink cheeks and a severe stare," laughed Melody, "*but* how Steppy would mind your having mentioned such a subject!"

"Quite, but I say isn't it lovely? Isn't it marvellous to be able to say everything out quite naturally to each other? Anything, Melody! Can't you to me? Yes. I can see *that*!"

That open stare of hers with which she looked up at Keith gave him the whole of Melody's heart—gave, even if it did not show, every fold and corner of it. But, as for showing . . . What? Tell Keith every detail of the history of that brute who had tried to strangle her last night? (Who, far worse, had magnetized her into taking his kisses.) Should she? (Would you?) No. Not

yet, anyhow! This was no time for remembering there had ever been such a thing as another man on earth, whispered new-found woman's wisdom.

"All that matters now is that at last we've both got the sense to tumble to it that, whatever anybody else makes of things, *we belong*. Like—like a pair of really posh silk stockings . . . excuse my poeticness! Keith, with me it hasn't been for years, but I do so adore you now, myself," she admitted, so simply that young Keith gave one quick glance over his shoulder. (Nobody near; just that old woman with the little cart drawn by a shaggy dog in the distance. Just the backs of a couple of stumpy, light-blue-uniformed recruits tramping downhill into the town.) He snatched off and tossed on to the cobbles at his feet that old grey hat of his before he drew Melody close, under that arm of shadow, into his own strong arms and let his most intent look down, down into her eyes . . . "Do you remember—"

Behind them the warm breeze of late summer stirred in the plane trees; leaf whispered to hand-shaped leaf . . . as once in May . . .

"Oh, but, Keith," she sighed passionately, "I believe it must have been for years after all, with me too . . ."

"Darling." He put a brown hand at each side of her alight and startled face, raised it to his . . .

The magnetism of him! *Who* said somewhere "your Englishman who does not know either how to give or to receive a caress"? Fool. Oh, but for years, Keith . . . Always, unconsciously, this was what she had meant, hungered for, longed for. . . . She was in luck that she had waited for this. For a woman to undertake to set

forth on her love-life without the driving-force of Passion is as though she sought to start out in a magnificent Bentley without turning on the petrol . . . Oh, but all those dud years *before*, Keith, precious, without this! He was crushing kisses on her mouth, kisses sweet as blondest honey, kisses into which he whispered name after pet name. No! I will not tell you these; Melody, whose heart would never lose them, would never even echo them with her lips. . . . Those unheard are sweeter. . . . At last—too soon!—he drew back, shaking a little, to clear his throat, to ask: “What? What did you say about thrills?”

“*Frills*,” she corrected him, with a small broken laugh. “You people who are so proud because there are ‘no frills’ about you . . . Last night before I went to sleep I said to myself, ‘I would rather have Keith with no frills than all the frills in the world . . . not from Keith!’ But you *are* a fraud. You *can*. I am to have both then? *And* have taken that job, *and* have accepted you. . . . After all, all a girl wants is to eat her cake, and have it! And why not?” happily babbled Melody Wynne.

The warm breeze laughed in the plane trees above them, leaf whispered to the hand-shaped leaf . . . Almost they missed the boat! Finally, as they strode downhill to the harbour, the gang-plank, the crowds, and the fatherly Jack-of-all-Trades who was now in charge of their combined luggage, Keith, tenderly teasing, asked her: “And what about that voyage to India, my priceless child, with ‘things still happening’?”

“Voyage to *India*?—Oh, I remember saying all that. No, thank you so excessively much; not without you.”

"But suppose you're only thinking like this just for the moment? And later on, say in two years' time, you regret that Joy-ride, Melody?"

"Isn't it up to the man a girl loves," the girl challenged him, "to go on putting the joy into any joy-ride?"

CHAPTER XXI

FINALE

*About an unusual kind of honeymoon;
and about what was won by waiting*

I

Two and a half years later the passengers of one of those high-powered, South-of-France autocars which take day trips "*from Sea to Mountains*" (and which, on this occasion, was to follow the Grande Corniche through Mentone up to the Italian frontier, and back by way of Monte Carlo, and Nice, to Juan-les-Pins) found an interest in the young couple who sat in the front seat next to the black-browed Marseillaise driver.

With the light-hearted ease of the English well-formed, the two wore their none-too-smart clothes; he, grey flannels, belted trench-coat, and an incredibly old grey felt hat with a black band and rain-spots; she, a sun-faded wrap-coat with one of those inevitable French *bérets* of white felt covering the whole of her hair, which bulged it out at the back, showing she wore a bun; her head-gear being less carefully put on than were her silk stockings and number-four-size shoes. The couple were alike, long-

limbed, blonde, pleasantly-featured, and, as that autocar pounded up or thundered down the mountain roads, they took the same zest in the same features of the dramatic Riviera landscape, (Ah, bird's-eye vista of blue Mediterranean! Descending flights of olive groves, now silvery, now verdigris, in the stroking breeze! Spilth of southern flowers over basking balconies! Mimosa's yellow mist or the outpouring of Bougainvillæa!—"Oh, look at *that*. . .") Alike about man and girl hung an atmosphere of forceful unselfconscious enjoyment. Everything was "*fun*" to them, and they showed it with the give-and-take glances, tiny identical gestures, and idiomatic phrases that often mark those who have come from the same large and happy home-circle.

"I say," the girl was prattling softly, "did you get what that black beard with the Frenchman joined on to it was saying last time we got out?"

"Talked too fast," complained the Englishman. "I got that, as usual, it was about *you*?"

"About us, this time. '*Curious that of an affectionate brother and sister, people say they might be newly-married lovers, but of a well-matched couple that they are more like an affectionate brother and sister!*' . . . And then his wife, with the ear-trumpet, told him that personally she would have taken us for a couple even now on our honeymoon, but for what we had brought with us?"

A baby-girl, sheathed all in wool, and capped with a smaller béret like her mother's, with the form of a Raphael cherub and the face of an infant Sphinx, filled her mother's lap. Her blue eyes stared unwinkingly before

her. If the shadow of a rock fell too suddenly across the car, she made to dismiss it with the wave of a pink hand, and a serious "Jao," for her vocabulary consisted of three words, "Ao, Lao, and Jao," which are, being interpreted, "Come, Fetch, Go," for she was Indian-born, a missy-baba whose ayah had not yet ceased to mourn over the parting, and whose full name was Claudia June Cartwright.

"Bit unusual to take a baby on a honeymoon. But I don't see why *she* should stop it's being one? Jolly good idea for honeymoons, I think. Might make more of them a success," retorted the young father. "Shall I take her for a bit?" He settled her on his knee; her blue eyes continued to stare unwinking, as the jagged coast-line dropped away, or soared in beauty beside the car, and over her head Keith Cartwright and his wife, Melody, went on chattering as gaily as though they had not met for weeks.

They were, actually, just home from India, and had planned to spend a week's holiday in southern sunshine before they travelled further north, to brave the weeping showers and buffeting winds of Spring in England on visits to their people. At intervals the black-browed Mar-seillaise checked the car, rose, swept a swarthy hand towards various points of the precipitous scenery, in rich patois quoting the guide-book, pointing out this newly-built viaduct, or that eleventh-century château. Lunch they took under vines at an *auberge*, so high up in the mountains that across the valley the opposite landscape seemed like a wallpaper of grey and silver. Then the great car re-starting, dropped, dropped, downhill, com-

ing at last to the most artificial of all the Mediterranean towns, of which the name alone spells drama—Monte Carlo!

II

"Here," announced the driver, "we rest an hour, for the ladies and gentlemen to visit the town, the café, the terrace, the Casino. We start from here in an hour's time."

Out clambered the passengers; the usual English spinsters, the convalescents, the French family parties, and, to a tourist, they made a bee-line, passport in hand, for those historic gambling rooms.

"Keith," laughed Melody, "you go in and try your luck."

Keith—a serene, contented, otherwise unchanged Keith—told her he knew his luck already, stock pretty high with his firm (who had shown they were braced to the eyes with him, and would have to pay for the indiscretion of showing this by raising his salary.) That would be quite all, thanks; except for the medal he claimed for being considered a comfortable husband?

"Yes; I'll give you that. . . . And *this*, Keith—"

"Right!" Taking the soft, wool-sheathed weight of Claudia June into his arms, he strolled beside Melody towards those gardens where Europe's greenest turf and gaudiest flowers deck Europe's stagiest setting, to the making and losing of fortunes; they merged with the moving crowds, a tide of people setting towards the rooms. Then, near that jeweller's shop that specializes in costly mascots for the gamblers, Melody beheld and pulled up beside a poster.

LA GRANDE ARABESQUE.

With Her Chorus of Girls Anglaises,
and her Dancing Partner,
Mr. George B. Nielson,
in Dances from the
Sensational Success of Paris,

CA C'EST MONTMARTRE.

"Keith!" Melody cried, with a sudden uprush of excitement. "Will you look what's on here? Oh, we ought to come over and see this—"

"I," Keith told her, "have seen all I wanted. One time, when I was in Paris, I went to a *matinée* of that show."

"Oh, did you like it?" Melody said, conversationally, and, conversationally Keith replied, "Can't say I cared terribly about it; the fact was, that afternoon the girl wasn't on in it that I rather wanted to see."

Their eyes met, over their child's solemn white-béret-covered head, and, as though over a piece of wit, Keith and Melody laughed aloud. They were still laughing as they turned the corner up towards the rooms. (*"For we may as well see all the millionaires and their vamps going in, and all the ruined would-be suicides coming out!"* Melody had suggested.) And, forgetful of the crowd, they bumped into someone, a small, opulently-clad figure, who, with furs flung back from garden-party frock, was hastening full-tilt in the direction of the Café de Paris's entrance.

"Ow! Sorrory!" apologized a husky rich-Cockney

voice. Then it screamed, "My Gawd!" Adding, "If it isn't Melody and the Bun! It is! And 'er Keith! Well, whoever'd 'ave thought it? It's Melody and the Nipper. Ow, Mel.! Wot a duck! Ello, lovie. 'As it got a nice kiss for its Auntie Gin?"

Out went the pink, star-fish hand of Claudia June, to grab at the spray of orchids fastened in the deep collar of Ginger's chinchilla coat.

III

Two minutes later the four of them were seated at a table in the sunshine outside that international caravan-serai. The pitch was packed. As well as these humbler friends of ours, there were present the furs, the new "line" in three-piece costumes, the masks of make-up, the monocles, the boots by Mr. Lobb, the sports clothes from Machin, the bags, the cigarette-holders, and the personalities of many of those whose photograph (sometimes "with friend"), you weekly expect of the *Tatler*, *Eve*, *Vanity Fair*. Here were the Dolly Sisters, the various stars of sport and screen, the mannequins from Irfé, the rejuvenated Duchess, the foreign titles, and at least two novelists of international repute. Here they came to sun and show themselves, to order a side-car, to exchange greetings before they passed on, either to their flutter in those unutterably stuffy rooms, or to their stroll along that terrace overlooking the sapphire Bay. What their thoughts were, God and some of their maids may know; their chat, in every European (and several other languages) mingled with gushes of fiery Zigane music from that or-

chestra beyond the wheeling glass-doors at their back, and with the tireless flow of Ginger's Cockney.

"Crush 'ere, ain't there? Looks like a full 'ouse at the Arerbesk," gabbled Ginger of the Johnson-Brown Girls . . . an exotically-clad Ginger, but with a familiar gesture of nodding luck to her friends over a double gin-fizz.

"No, you don't!" she admonished the baby, who, stimulated by the stir all about her, was making an effort to clutch at the glass that sparkled in the sunshine. "What's her name? Started to put the claw in Claudia all right, hasn't she? Yes, you 'ave the nobber my bag to suck, that's reel ivory, let 'er cut 'er teeth on that, she won't 'urt. Well, you tell me all about yourselves. . . ." But Melody was shy. She had remembered Ginger's aspirations about how she wished she could get to take a fancy to her some kind old gentleman with sixty thousand a year. Apparently that new-moon wish had come true; since what else could have sunk Ginger deep in these costly furs, have shod her and stockinged her as though she were herself the grande Arabesque, have hatted her so that the brim of the moment swept over all but half of one street-arab eye? and have perfumed her with this positive hurricane of *Toute la Nuit*? And Melody was not perfectly sure how Keith might take this . . . For even with the most happy-go-lucky of comrade-lovers (Keith, having proved to be of those who, in place of marriage-by-capture, have made for their partners a new heaven and a new earth, so that strangers think they might be happily brother and sister, plus all the rest!) Even so, one never knows what may be going to shock men.

But Keith's fair face seemed still untroubled, while Ginger gabbled of the show. "'Ere a fortnight, it had been. Fed up? I've got to never knowin' when I'm doin' it. What's that. Look up some of the other girls? No one for you to look up now, Mel., except only young Sybil."

Sybil, it appeared, was one of these girls who would stay always and forever in the same old show; too scared of having to go through another audition, to move. As for the rest of the Clique, Ginger gabbled, while Mrs. Keith Cartwright became for the moment again one of the chorus, all ears for these echoes of old days, "Well! Madame Dewpond—you know, Mamie—she was still out in that nice little house at Passy. Two dear little boys she'd got. But talk about *Fat!* Then there was Hanne. Hadn't Melody got the bitter Wedding-cake from Hanne? She and Teddy had this job at some Casino in Cannes now. Acrobatic exhibition-dancers. *The Marvells*. Pop over and see them, can't you? Anne's kick nearly got through a skylight one night! Oh, just the same as they always was, those two. One minute scrapping, never going to speak again—Gubbye, hear of me from my lawyers; divorce! The next second all over, the best of friends before you could say knife!"

Old Earwaker? Still nosing round making mischief!

And Orville K. Kent. . . . Melody remembered *him?* Well, if Orville hadn't walked out of the show six months after Melody. Walked straight out. Good for him; Ginger never thought he 'ad it innim. Someone said they heard he'd chucked dancing and was back in Arizoner, but not a soul in the theatre knew what had happened;

as for her, Arerbesk, she'd got another prize lizard now, that scream called Georgie B. Nielson.

Why, yes, then there were some more of Melody's friends Hanne said she'd run across. French people called Rainy—

"Nanette!" exclaimed the Cartwrights.

"Four of 'em. Par, Mar, and two girls. Used to be in Melody's caravan show. That's right! Touring with their own act now, and the youngest of the daughters ever such a success, going to be a mile impersonator," Ginger continued her tale.

"And my, the blood-and-thunder story that they'd told Hanne, about that fellow in their company, that young mad lunatic who'd tried to do in Melody, after the show. . . . Ought to have been strung up for it, so he did. People like that didn't ought to be left at large, nor they didn't. But these people called Rainy, said there was ever such a grand lady in Paris had left her home for him; run away with him to Naples, with ever such a lot of money; them going everywhere together in a lovely Mercedes. However some women can make such fools of themselves I don't know, do you, Melody?"

Hastily Melody said something, anything, and set the matchstand out of the reach of Claudia June. Not often did the memory intrude of that Apache, André Toussaint, but when it did, it had power to bring a sudden chill into the warmest mimosa-scented breeze, to cast a gloom across the most brilliant sunlit crowded scene. To think that something had once been said about Melody taking a dancing job over here in the Midi? Hush, Memory. That of André's kisses was now more to be avoided by

Melody than that of the attempted murder, that nightmare struggle on a stage with the curtain down. Of that night she never thought. She thought sometimes still of that afternoon. And across that afternoon Melody still wished (not gratefully, not even wisely!) that there could have been drawn some magic obliterating sponge. . . .

And what about Melody's people . . . her old man going strong? Good! . . . And that brother of hers; Bill, wasn't he? Married, Ginger supposed. What, not yet? What, the girl let him down? Dark, quiet little mouse called Doris, Doreen who was at the party? Married someone *else*? Cool! Well, praps it was all for the best. . . . Dream of a fellow, though, that brother of Melody's! Bill, the Bachelor.

Keith's pleasant voice asked cheerily, "Well, and what about you, Ginger?"

She had been waiting for this.

"What about me?" she echoed, complacently, setting down her empty cocktail-glass, and spreading herself over the chair. "Noticed my coat, 'ave you?"

"Could we miss it?"

"Chinchiller," purred Ginger. "Always 'ad a fancy for that. Always wanted one! Won by waitin'. A week ago I got this given. In luck, aren't I? I only met 'im here."

"Your—your friend?"

"Me fiancay," said Ginger primly. Then, with an Elsa Lanchester gesture, she pulled off the pale-kid glove with which she had been concealing the winking platinum-set and blatant diamond. Claudia June made a grab for it, but was restrained by a "You wait your turn,

Miss. . . . Yes, Mel.! Him and me's to be married as soon as we can get our birth cittificates and papers and everything right. You know what these Froggies are, about anyone from another country. . . . He's an Argentine gentleman—"

"Oh, is he?" said Melody, avoiding Keith's eyes. "How old is he, Ginger?"

"None too young, dearie. These attractive men never are." Melody's heart whispering "*seventy?*" failed her again. She was, however, re-assured by the nineteen-year-old Ginger's, "He's all of thirty-three; dark, fine-looking man, ever such a lot of property in Buenos Aires. It, he thinks me. Don't know much English, only '*I love you,*' but we get on all right with that and my bitter French. Well, s'pose I got to toddle on and meet 'im now? At three I told 'im, but there! Does gentlemen good to keep 'em waiting, I say. Think the more of you for it; isn't that right, Keith?"

She would have borne her friends along with her then and there, to introduce to them the Argentine Cophetua; but this attractive man they were fated not to meet. For already, from down the little crowded street and past the jeweller's, there had sounded, unheeded, an anguished hooting of the autocar's horn. Now there appeared before their table, gesticulating despairingly, the autocar's black-browed Marseillaise driver himself.

"Time to start? But, we are late! Very late. All the world waiting. All the world there but Monsieur and Madame. You are awaited! You are awaited—"

"Right-o! (We shall have to fly.) Good-bye, Ginger. The best of all possible luck!"

"And to you, Mel., old girl! Good-bye, Nipper! Good-bye, Keith!" Loud kisses to all three.

"Come on, Keith; have to step on it. Seize Claudia June. Good-bye!"

And they run out of this book, as they ran into it—legging it, side by side, to catch the bus, together.

"Joy-ride!" hooted the horn. "Joy-ride!"

THE END



